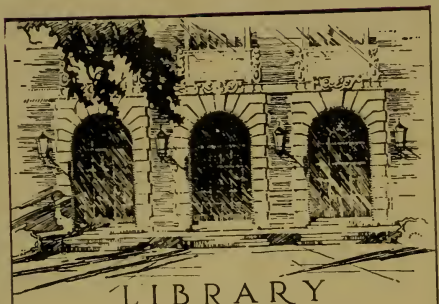
The Twin Souls



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THE TWIN SOUL

OR,

THE STRANGE EXPERIENCES

OF

MR. RAMESES.

A Psychological and Realistic Romance.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II

" Fay que mon âme à la tienne s'assemble,
Range nos cœurs et nos esprits ensemble,
L'amour l'entend ainsi ;
Tu es mon feu, je dois être ta flamme,
Et dois encor puisque je suis ton âme
Etre la mienne aussi ! "

—PHILIPPES DES PORTES, 1575.

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THE TWIN SOUL.

THE TWIN SOUL.

A Psychological and Realistic Romance.

CHAPTER I.

PARLIAMENTARY HONOURS.

By an unexpected combination of circumstances, Sir Hector MacTavish and Mr. Rameses were both invited to become candidates for the representation in Parliament of a Metropolitan borough. This particular borough happened to be blessed or cursed, as the reader may choose to consider it, with two Caucuses—or two Cauci, if that be the better word—who considered it to be their duty to guide the political sheep of the district into such pastures as pleased them. These caucuses grew like warts or wens upon the necks of the Radical and Conservative parties, the one being of opinion that Great Britain ought to occupy herself exclusively with her own affairs, and leave all the rest of the world to take care of itself; the other

that Great Britain ought to maintain herself as a Greater Britain, and that, as her Empire was world-wide, so ought her duties and responsibilities to be, and that not a hostile gun should be discharged in either hemisphere without her sanction or permission. Upon the great question of India, the policies they approved were diametrically opposed to each other. The Radicals were for letting India drift into self-government. The Conservatives, on the contrary, were for continuing the beneficent hold which the genius of the greatest of English statesmen and administrators had established over that vast country. Neither of these parties knew anything about India, except that it was large, populous, and rich; but both had an idea, born of conceit, ignorance, and presumption, that it was their duty to send into Parliament a man to expound their views, as far as they were expoundable. Mr. Rameses was a *persona grata* to the mole-eyed Radicals, because he was a native of India, and was thought to sympathise with the Indian people. Sir Hector was a *persona grata* to the Conservatives, because he had once governed a portion of India on English principles, and was in all probability ready to do so again if called upon, or at all events to support in Parlia-

ment the existing policy of British statesmanship. But the Radicals misunderstood the character of Mr. Rameses, as they very soon discovered on approaching him with their proposals. He would not be dictated to; he would not be a delegate or an echo; he would not be the mouthpiece of the opinions of shopkeepers, butchers, bakers, tailors, fishmongers, or even attorneys, or do that which he was bidden to do by people not half so well informed as himself, or not informed at all. He would neither whisper nor roar, nor laugh nor sigh, by dictation, but would be true to his own soul, and assert himself, *per fas* or *ne fas*, careless whom he might please or whom he might offend by so doing. The political admirers of Sir Hector MacTavish were a different kind of people. They chose their man because they knew what he meant, and because they were assured of his thorough independence of mind, character, and conduct; because they knew that he knew what they didn't know, and that he would not be driven or led from his purpose by fear or favour, by cajolery or force, or by the prizes that might be dangled before the eyes of his ambition and self-seeking. Sir Hector accepted the invitation to represent his party. Mr. Rameses

refused absolutely even to listen to the persuasions or representations of any party, least of all a party with which he had not a particle of sympathy; but went so far as to recommend them, if they required a native-born Indian to speak the truth for them, as the truth existed in his mind, to ask his secretary, Mr. Melville, whether the office would be agreeable to him. Mr. Melville was young and aspiring, and consented willingly, even eagerly. He had a sufficiency of British blood in his veins to appreciate fully the dignity conferred upon all who had the privilege of having their letters addressed with the magic letters "M.P." added to their names; and, apart from this knowledge, he had the conviction that he might be useful in Parliament, and possibly be enabled to carve out for himself an honourable if not a distinguished career. The caucus that selected him were gratified with his acquiescence, though their gratification was somewhat diminished and their pride in their own power and importance very greatly incensed, when an unexpected candidate presented himself, who had not asked their consent to solicit the suffrage of the "independent" electors, who were not to be treated in any respect as independent by the self-installed oligarchy of

busy-bodies, who thought they had as much right to the votes of the inhabitants as they had to the adulterated groceries and drugs in their shops, and to other commodities which they retailed to a confiding and defrauded public by short weight and measure. The candidate who dared to set the caucus at defiance was no other than our old friend Mr. Pigram—Fitzgerald—or "Old Methuselah," as the caucus speedily learned to call him—who came before the borough with a long purse, an unblushing amount of self-assurance or impudence, and a flavour of aristocratic affluence derived from the Stoney-Stratfords. Mr. Pigram Fitzgerald, as already stated, had indulged himself for a long time in visions of a baronetcy, as a reward to be obtained by political subserviency, or even of a peerage, for he was by no means modest or disposed to set a small value upon himself. He had even gone so far in dreams of his future greatness—like Alnaschar in the "Arabian Nights"—as to have fixed upon the title he would assume, either as baron or as viscount, when a grateful Prime Minister should reward his services. He discovered, or thought he had discovered (was it not the same thing?), that the original Pigrams, like the Browns and the Snookses, had come over with William the

Conqueror; that the true name of the family was Bigraime, and that he was the direct descendant of Hugo de Bigraime, who had been rewarded for his knightly support by lands in the fen country, and with the old ancestral manor-house of Bigraime Abbey.

The name of Mr. Pigram, now Mr. Fitzgerald, was no sooner announced in the newspapers as a candidate for the Metropolitan borough of Great Swindleton than the blank walls, hoardings, and vacant gable-ends of all the available houses in the said borough, together with the sides of the omnibuses and the cabs, were covered with bills, posters, and placards calling upon the electors to support by their votes the pretensions of "Old Methuselah" to represent them. These tactics produced a rebellion, a mutiny, or at least a schism in the ranks of the caucus; the one section resenting the unauthorised candidature of one who had presumed to offer himself without their sanction, the other party feeling it bad policy to resist the pretensions of a man who had money to spend, and who they thought had as much right to make a disreputable fortune by the Methuselah Life Pills as others had to make it by Aunt Mary's Soothing Elixir, warranted to send troublesome

babies to sleep in the grave, or at the very least to render them idiotic; or by Professor Quackenbosch's Infallible Hair Restorer, warranted to force the incipient moustache to grow on the upper lip of every smoking boy of fourteen, or even of twelve, if the smoking boy of that age considered that he was a man; or even to endow a slop-basin with hirsute honours. But the original caucus bore down all opposition, and by strenuous efforts succeeded in returning Mr. Melville by a small but sufficient majority. Thus faded, perished, grew dim and died, the hopes of a baronetcy or a peerage that had cheered the heart of the last descendant of the Bigraimes who came over with the Conqueror.

The discomfiture of Mr. Fitzgerald was not taken very greatly to heart by any of the Stoney-Stratford family—by Lady Gwendoline perhaps least of all. Her patrician pride was great enough to look without much disappointment on so small a rebuff as her husband — not by any means her lord and master — had experienced, and Lord Stoney-Stratford was rather glad than otherwise at what he called the "pull down" of a would-be upstart. But "Methuselah" himself was far from being disheartened.

"Was it not?" he asked Lady Gwendoline, who, however, did not think it necessary to answer the question, "the fate of the greatest statesmen to be sometimes rejected by popular constituencies? Were not the electors and non-electors of all boroughs, and, indeed, the whole population of Great Britain and Ireland, mostly fools, as an eminent authority declared them to be? And would not his hour come, in the fulness of the appointed time, if he only knew how to wait, and was clever enough to take advantage of his opportunities? Had not the famous Macaulay, the orator, the poet and the statesman, been rejected by Edinburgh in favour of a local tradesman?" He would bide his time, and sit in the House of Commons yet, if he did not sit in the House of Lords.

Finding no sympathy in his wife in these aspirations, he indulged then in solitude—over a bottle of choice old port at one of the clubs of which he was a member.

Mr. Melville bore his honours meekly. He was not elated at his success, though quietly resolved in his own mind to turn it to good account in the councils of the Legislature — especially upon Indian affairs. Mr. Rameses, in order to render his position secure, and

make him thoroughly independent of the caprices of fortune, settled a handsome annuity upon him.

The first person to whom Mr. Melville hastened to announce the news of his success was not his best friend, Mr. Rameses, but to one who was nearer to his heart. It was Lady Ethel Pierrepoint!

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS AND PRESENTIMENTS.

"WHENCE come our presentiments of good or evil?" enquired Mr. Rameses of Mr. De Vere, as they sat alone in the study of the great house in Kensington. "I knew this morning at breakfast-time that I should see you to-day, though I had no reason to expect your coming, and no notification of its probability. Can it be true, as Thomas Campbell says, in a poem that seems to me to be unrivalled in its simple grandeur, 'That coming events cast their shadows before'?"

"Presentiments," replied Mr. De Vere, "are not easily to be accounted for, and I shall not attempt to pry into the causes. The search would be idle."

"Calculations of probabilities, perhaps?" said Mr. Rameses.

"Not so," replied his friend, "or not invariably so. What are called predictions and prophecies are very often the result—as easily to be foreseen by attentive ob-

servers, who study the moves on the great chess-board of what we call Fate, as the corresponding moves of the pawns, the bishops, the knights, and the other pieces with which the world's game is played. It needs no gift of prophecy to foretell that if a man leaps from the top of a high building to the ground, or discharges a bullet from a pistol into his brain, that death will ensue. But presentiments are not to be traced to calculations, and do not depend upon them. For instance, I take my walk in the streets of a crowded city, and suddenly think, I know not why, of a man whom I have not seen or heard of, perhaps, for a quarter of a century, and five minutes afterwards I meet that very man face to face (a circumstance that has happened to me more than once). How am I to account for its occurrence? And if the news of a great battle, or other decisive event, is known and promulgated at a distance to which the ordinary physical agencies could not by any possibility have conveyed it (I speak, of course, of the days before science put a girdle, by means of electricity, around the globe in forty minutes) how is the fact to be accounted for by any known material or physical laws? "

"How, indeed?" rejoined Mr. Rameses.

"And by the same mysterious agencies, whatever they may be, are not the strange premonitions afforded to us in dreams to be received and respected as messages from the unseen world, not transmissible to our vulgar senses, but not altogether unintelligible to that power within us, which exists, acts and is acted upon irrespective of our bodily perceptions? For instance, I once received what I must now consider to have been a message from Australia, from the disembodied soul of a dear friend, who I did not know had thrown off the garb of mortality to assume immortality. The message came to me in the dead of the night, when I lay, half-sleeping and half-waking, tossing about uneasily on my pillow, and having no reason to think of him or anybody else. A fortnight afterwards the news reached me by letter that on the very instant when the sudden fancy took possession of me that all was not well with him in this sub-solar sphere, he had been drowned at sea, when out on an excursion of pleasure. I learned on the following day that at the identical moment when his soul had left his body, a strange bird had perched upon the great tower of the parish

church of the ancient borough which he represented in Parliament."

"Poor bird!" interrupted Mr. Rameses.

"Yes, for, with the abominable habit peculiar to the English, of the lower as well as the upper classes, the beadle of the parish, noticing the appearance of the unusual visitor, rushed into his house close by, and bringing out his gun, took deliberate aim at the unoffending stranger, and had the diabolical satisfaction—*I* call it diabolical, with a proper consideration of the meaning of the word—of seeing it fall dead at his feet."

"You thought it, probably, a case of the metempsychosis?"

"Yes, and I think so still," said Mr. De Vere. "Our great Shakespear, who left scarcely anything untouched, and who, as was less truly said of a far inferior man, touched nothing that he did not adorn, alludes in one of his sonnets to the rapidity of our thoughts, and their utter scorn of distance, which he had intimated to the unobservant world in the finely poetic play of the *Tempest* in the little speech of his 'dainty Ariel.'

> '*If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,*
> *Injurious distance should not stop my way,*
> *For then, despite of space I would be brought,*
> *From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.*
> No matter then, although my foot did stand
> Upon the furthest Earth removed from thee,
> For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,
> As soon as think the place where he would be.'"

"I have thought of these matters earnestly and long," said Mr. Rameses, with a sigh, "and have come to a conclusion which satisfies my own mind—though it may not satisfy the precise mind of a geometrician, or the dense mind of a materialist—if such words as precise or dense can be applied to mind in the abstract. Thought is the result of spiritual and not of mere mechanical action—else a watch or a steam-engine might be made to think; and thought or spirit, though it exist in the body, is not the result of body, nor confined to the body. We know that spirit *is*, but we do not know *what* it is; and he who would confine it to the body, would circumscribe the uncircumscribable, limit the limitless, render finite the infinite, and bend the interminable straight line of God's purpose into a circle. What we consent to call spirit is not confined in what we consent to call our mortal life—within the bounds of

the mortal frame—but, even when attached to and linked with it, has the faculty of indefinite expansion. It is like a light, that is not imprisoned in the burning substance on which it feeds, but spreads afar out into the surrounding darkness. Do you gather my meaning?"

"I think I do—nay I am sure I do. Go on!"

"So the light of the spirit extends beyond the wick that it consumes, and goes before it into the apparent void. Thus, when this morning I had a presentiment that I should speedily be aware of your presence in the flesh—it was the effusive and diffusive light of my spiritual essence meeting and commingling with the corresponding light of your spirit; that produced the presentiment which has led to this (not I hope useless) discussion that has grown up between us."

"If the theory could be accepted," said Mr. De Vere, "it would account for some of the phenomena of dreams."

"For all of them, if conjoined with what I must consider the possible renewals of past impressions upon the tablets of the brain, to be sometimes deciphered in clear moments by the cunning reader."

"You remind me of what was said by another poet, who cultivated the fruitage of a mighty mind in the solitudes of the mountains, and did not waste his energies amid the vain babble of fashionable Society—I mean Wordsworth :—

"'Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our thoughts have sight of that immortal sea,
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.'"

"Beautiful, exceedingly!" ejaculated Mr. Rameses.

"Yes, beautiful exceedingly, whether we apply the poet's deep insight into the inner faculties of our souls to our waking reveries and presentiments, or to the dreams that come unbidden to the mind when the body sleeps, and the immortal mind revels in unrestrained liberty. I am not a poet, I am not a musician, I am not an architect, I am not an orator—and could not be either, if I tried ever so ardently to develop myself in these capacities. But I have been a poet in my dreams—an inspired improvisatore (I use the the word *inspired* deliberately and with a full sense of its meaning)—and have poured forth joyous lyrics

with all the spontaneity of a skylark singing a hymn to the morning, or, with equal spontaneity, a river of melancholy lyrics, such as the nightingale sings to the evening star, or the moon, or the listening forest. I have systematically repeated them in my dreams, because I earnestly wished to remember them when I wakened. But the waking mind was a blank. I could not recall a word, or a thought, of any of my lyrical outbursts."

"The soul spoke in you, and displayed its infinite superiority to the clay that oppressed it."

"In like manner, though I love music as fervently as I love poetry, I can no more compose a melody in my waking hours, than I can fly—but in my sleep I can rival Mozart and Beethoven, and put Wagner to shame. I can, while in the same state of cerebral exaltation—and utterly defiant of physical trammels—imagine palaces, cathedrals, towers and temples, of an architecture that neither Sir Christopher Wren, nor Inigo Jones, nor Vanbrugh, nor Vitruvius, nor the builders of Greece, Rome, Babylon, Nineveh or Egypt, could equal for proportion, for novelty, for magnificence of bulk, or for elegance of outline. Any one of them, if I could but have traced its plan upon paper,

would have enrolled my name among those of the greatest builders that the world has seen; but the designs perished in my brain, as soon as they were pictured in my thought, and left no more trace behind them than the soap bubbles blown by an idle child on a summer morning. So also, though the ideas always fail me, as well as the words with which I would clothe them, whenever I seek to address a large assemblage of my fellow-creatures. I can in my dreams be as verbose as the great Mr. Wordy Rattlestone or any other Prime Minister who darkens counsel with vain words, and far more eloquent than any one who in our day subdues a listening senate into compulsory admiration. But on waking, all the fire and glow have departed; the ideas which, a few minutes before, were strong and clear have become vague, shadowy and indistinct; the words, if I strive to recall them, as I often do, refuse to obey the intelligence that would command them; the words halt and, stumble like blind cripples that have no one to guide them, and the body becomes the temporary master and tyrant of the soul."

"And yet you, oh my friend, who confess to these experiences, received with gentle scepticism my cherished

dreams of the happiness of Amenophra and Lurulà, and the possible connection of these fair creatures with my mortal destiny."

"Not exactly with scepticism," replied Mr. De Vere, "but with what I may call *ignoration*."

And, saying this, the philosopher of the Rookery approached a large vase that stood on a pedestal in the sunlight of the open window, in which three or four gold fish were disporting themselves.

"These are subjects," he continued, "on which we can speculate till the brain grows dizzy with multitudinous perplexities, but on which we can never arrive at any convincing conclusion, and of which it is impossible in this little glass vase—the world—in which we move about for seventy years, or less or more, that we can ever know anything of the great Universe beyond its little circumference. What know these fishes of you or me? What *can* they know? And what can *we* know of the illimitable world in which our lot is cast? What knows the noonday midge of yesterday or to-morrow? What does it know even of to-day?"

"Too true," sighed Mr. Rameses. "We know nothing,

but we feel much. And when I say we know nothing, I am wrong. We know more than in our temporary ignorance we think we know. I have read your great poet Wordsworth, and agree with him in believing that :

" ' Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us—our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory doth it come,
From God who is our home ! '

When the two friends parted after this interchange of their not very conflicting ideas, Mr. De Vere returned to his books and his garden at his well-beloved Rookery ; and Mr. Rameses paid a long-promised visit to Sir Hector and Lady MacTavish—and the beautiful Niona.

CHAPTER III.

HESITANCY.

Mr. Rameses was in love, but, having outlived the sprouting and budding period of adolescence, was no longer governed by the feelings that had played the tyrant over his mind and body, when every beautiful new face became a new enslaver. He had reached the "*mezza cammin*" and summer of life, and the romantic fancies of the spring of his early manhood had ceased to run hot in his blood. A serene philosophy had taken the place once occupied by the passions of the purely animal life. But if "Love laughs at locksmiths," as the old proverb says, it laughs at Philosophy. Should a struggle arise between the two, and Philosophy acts as the challenger, Love is very likely to gain the victory. So Mr. Rameses found, whenever the image of Niona arose in his mind, or presented itself before his eyes in the living reality of her faultless form, her soul-speaking eyes, her sunny smile, and when he heard the delicious music of her voice. The charm, the fascination,

the glamour and the witchery were so irresistible, that he yielded himself a willing captive to the might of her gentleness. And yet a spiritual philosophy mingled with the physical passion that possessed and governed him. In the "hidden chambers of his brain" there was linked with the living and present image of the visible Niona the invisible image of the dead and departed Lurulà so indissolubly that he would have striven in vain to separate them, even if he had endeavoured to do so. But so far from making the futile attempt, he encouraged and strengthened in thoughts, and dreams, and theories, and speculations, the beloved idea that had gradually become a part of his intellectual and physical nature. The "twin soul," which Lady Stoney-Stratford would have rejoiced to know that he had found—or imagined that he had found—in one of her daughters, although in her heart she held the idea to be more the work of an eccentric boy than of a staid middle-aged philosopher, seemed to the pre-occupied imagination of Mr. Rameses to have been discovered in the lovely mortal frame of Niona. The innocent unselfishness of her character lent her a peculiar charm, and the differences in their mental qualities and idiosyncrasies seemed

to the fascinated eyes of Mr. Rameses to be no more than the differences in his own mortal frame, between the right hand and the left, necessary, however, to the completion of the structure, or as that between the light of morning and the darkness of night, both of which went to the formation of the complete circle of the day. When people speak of past or present days, they include past or present nights, and when he spoke of Niona to his own enamoured mind, he thought of her as a part of himself, he fondly hoped that she was destined to be (to use the sacred formula) bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, as she was already heart of his heart, mind of his mind, and soul of his soul —now and for evermore.

The love of precious stones which Niona shared with nearly all her sex, was not distasteful to Mr. Rameses. On the contrary, it was pleasant to him to think of her as adorned with such costly diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and pearls as Queens might envy—and strive in vain to possess—all of them to be provided at his expense, not only as a gratification to her, but as double, triple, and even centuple gratification to him to see her wear them.

The luxury of giving was to the mind of Mr. Rameses the greatest of all luxuries that pertained to great wealth, a luxury truly divine, he thought, and which he enjoyed with an enjoyment as full and complete as the lark and the nightingale enjoy in singing, or as the great Sun himself enjoys in shining.

He and Niona were of the same race and faith, believed in the same Great Spirit of the Universe, of which their own spirits were the immortal and eternal emanations. He and she held that it was not chance, but something far greater and diviner, that had drawn them together on the summit of Ben Ledi, to render their homage to the vivifying, purifying, ennobling fire, that was the representative and agent of God in the maintenance of that infinitesimal corner of the universe in which their lot was cast, during the brief day or hour of their mortal existence.

Mr. Rameses lacked the resolution, not only to declare the love he felt for Niona, but to take the more decisive step of asking her to go through the ceremony of marriage with him. He considered that their souls had been espoused from all eternity, and that the marriage of the body, however respectable and necessary it might be in

this world, was clearly supererogatory as regarded that holier union which had been consummated ere this world existed. But the question remained, was Niona herself, in her womanly capacity, and with the purely womanly intelligence, prepared to admit this heavenly marriage as an indisputable fact? While this spiritual and celestial question remained unsolved and insoluble, the physical and worldly question was as vulgar and commonplace as it would have been between Mary the Cook and Thomas the Policeman, or any other pair of men and women, in high or low life. To the mind of Mr. Rameses, the human marriage, considered in this light, was a derogation from the mystic beauty of the eternal sacrament, that merely gave the sanction of what is called Society to that which had not only been already sanctioned, but irrevocably decreed by God and Nature. Nevertheless, Mr. Rameses felt that, in deference and obedience to the law, custom, and binding obligations of all civilized life on this planet, the consent of Niona must be obtained to this earthly union, and duly proclaimed from the house-tops of publicity, so that the door-keepers of the great temple of Fashion, and the worshippers at the shrine, might have full

knowledge of the relationship which these two persons were to bear to the world in which they lived, and especially to the society in which they moved.

Niona, when they met alone in the conservatory of Sir Hector's house in Grosvenor Place, was aware by observing a something in his air and manner, in the expression of his face, in the light in his eloquent eyes, and in his hesitancy while addressing the few sentences that were drawn from his lips by the ordinary courtesies of friendly intercourse, that he had something of more than usual importance to say to her. The inopportune arrival of the Ladies Maud and Ethel Pierrepoint at the very moment when an avowal and a proposal were trembling for utterance on his tongue, put a stop to the imminent disclosure for a time. Mr. Rameses was not sorry for the temporary interruption; it gave him time to collect his thoughts, and strengthened him in the half-formed resolution of taking counsel on the subject with Sir Hector, the natural guardian of the fair Niona, in the strange country to which he had brought her.

The half reformed resolution attained full growth and maturity in the time occupied by one swing of the pendulum.

The question, plainly put, was plainly answered. Sir Hector would have been delighted—if the state of his liver had permitted him to be delighted at anything—when Mr. Rameses unfolded to him his design of marrying the gentle, dreamy, docile, beautiful and intelligent Niona, if she would accept him. "I cannot answer for Niona, or any other woman," said Sir Hector, "but I have no doubt whatever but that her heart has long inclined towards you, and that she will think herself a happy and an honoured woman in becoming the wife of one whom she esteems so highly, and with whom she has so many feelings, ideas, and sympathies in common. You are both of the same religion, or the same faith, which is a word I like better. This is a great advantage in matrimony. Fortunately for me, before I married her sister, I had taken care that no dispute or divergency of opinion on the merits or truth of Sun-worship and Christianity should ever arise between us. She became a Christian because I wished her to become one, or at all events she conformed to the ritual and doctrine of the Established Church of England. She has behaved herself ever since as a good Christian, or a good Buddhist, should do—worshipping God, loving her neighbour as much as she

can, on the great Christian principle that I strive to instil into her mind, that love to God includes the love of her fellow creatures, the giving of alms according to her means, the speaking ill of no one, the visiting of the widows and the fatherless in their distress. She is contented with good works, for which, according to some who call themselves ultra-orthodox Christians, she will be damned to all eternity. But she has not heard this cruel doctrine preached, and would not, I think, be frightened by it if she did. But have you thought in what manner, and with what religious rites, if any, you will be married?" asked Sir Hector.

"I have thought of it seriously," replied Mr. Rameses. "Being in Rome, as it were, I must do as the Romans do. Being in England, I must, on so solemn an occasion as marriage, act as if I were an Englishman. Being in a Christian land, I must, if I do no violence to my own conscience, satisfy the opinions of Christian Society. I am not a Jew, or I might, without offence to Society or its opinions be married in the Jewish manner; but being a believer in the faith of Jesus, as taught by Him, though not in the legends that have gathered around His great name, I have qualified myself for admission at the

Roman Catholic Church by submitting to the mystic ceremony of baptism by water—not by fire."

"But why Roman Catholic?" enquired Sir Hector, "and not the Protestant faith?"

"Because," replied Mr. Rameses, "the word Protestant is a denial of some part of the original faith. Faith is the very essence and quintessence of all Religion, and if a protest against any part of the faith can be allowed, there is no logical limit to be put to a second, or third, or any number of protests, until, in commercial language, ninety-nine per cent. of the faith may be protested against. My heart is Christian, and, if the love of God and my neighbour, and the desire to do good to my fellows, and to obey the immutable and divine laws of the Creator, can avail, my conduct is Christian also."

"Christian, with a reservation, is what you claim to be?" said Sir Hector. "Well, I suppose the majority of Christians have reservations also. But, Niona? She must be baptized, if a marriage between you is to be celebrated by a Christian priest?"

"All has been foreseen," replied Mr. Rameses. "As I have determined to make England my future home, I

desire to stand well, for my wife's sake as well as for my own, in the opinion of the English people. My right hand is not to know what my left hand has done, or I might enlighten you on the number and amount of my benefactions to the Catholic Church; not only of those which I have contributed in my own name, but of those which I have contributed in the name of Niona."

The colloquy might have continued much longer on the knotty point of seeming conformity thus involved, if Mr. Rameses had not diverted the discussion from the subject of conformity into that of religious belief in general. "In my progress through the world," he said, "I have observed that people are always apt to glorify themselves for their adherence to what they call the true faith. But the true faith, as they call it, is invariably that of the country in which they happen to have been born. Religions, like morality, are of geographical growth, much the same as the 'fauna' and 'flora' of the regions in which they flourish. The same great idea pervades and underlies them all. I can quite understand that a Mahometan, a Buddhist, or a Red Indian, who believes in the Great Spirit Manitou, or a Negro who believes in Mumbo Jumbo; or a South Sea

Islander, who thinks it a religious duty to put his feeble old grandfather to death when the grandfather's age and infirmities render life a trouble to himself and a painful spectacle to his descendants—pride themselves, one and all, on their superior merits in clinging to the faith and worship of their country and their ancestors, and arrogate to themselves a superiority over other nations, the people of which do not think as they think, observe as they observe, and pray as they pray.

"I do not believe that men speak correctly when they say of another that he has *changed* his religion. The spirit of religion is of the same essence all over the world, and has been so in all times. It is only the form and ceremonial that differ. The ancient Greeks and Romans did not, as it appears to me, worship several gods—as it is commonly and ignorantly supposed they did—but recognised only one God, under several names, just as the Jews knew one great and supreme God as El Shaddai, Elohim, Jehovah, the Lord, and the Almighty, and as the English recognize and worship the one God, as God the Father, the Holy Spirit, Heaven, and Providence. They also recognize and worship Him by the name which Christianity inherited and

adopted from Judaism—in what appears to me to be the futile and most unhappy attempt to engraft the old religion of Vengeance, Fear, and Terror upon the new religion of Peace, Goodwill, and Love, which the Western nations adopted nearly twenty centuries ago. Jupiter, Jove, and Apollo, were but one divine Being, and all the minor names of the deities of ancient mythology, whether male or female, were only used to describe the functions and attributes of the sole God and Creator of the Universe. Faith is not sectional and local, but universal. The true worshipper and believer sits in the portico of the Great Temple of Knowledge, to receive and welcome every truth that enters. No truth is alien or unrelated to any other truth; and every truth, great or small, is a link in one eternal and infinite chain, and cannot possibly misfit with or contradict any other."

"Precisely so," said Sir Hector. "The various attributes of the great God were made into little gods by priests, for the benefit of their craft. Did you ever hear of the English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, who was accused of Atheism, and denounced and anathematized by the professional dealers in doctrine and dogma, for having dared to promulgate, in

a philosophical book, that the dearest wish of his heart was 'to maximize religion, and minimize priestcraft'?"

"I never heard his name," replied Mr. Rameses, "but I shall honour his memory from this time forth, and rank him as high as the Chinese philosopher, 'Kong-Fut-Ze,' whom Latin pedants—writing in the same unnatural style as your friend Bentham did in the wise phrase you have just cited—agree to call Confucius. But to return to the subject of the beautiful Niona, from which we have wandered, may I consider that I have your approbation in the proposal that I have resolved to make, that she unite her destiny to mine, solemnly, publicly, according to the rites of the Christian Church?"

"Certainly," replied Sir Hector, grasping Mr. Rameses by the hand, with a grip that almost brought the moisture to his eyes, "my approbation and my blessing along with it."

Mr. Rameses took his departure, satisfied with Sir Hector, with himself, and with his prospects of acceptance by Niona. But he still hesitated to take the final plunge into the deep sea of uncertainty, and deferred until the morrow —or possibly until a later time—the decision on which his happiness in this world depended.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FINAL DECLARATION.

THE declaration of Mr. Rameses, which he had resolved to make personally rather than by letter, was received by Niona with a joy that was none the less deeply felt because it was not manifested by outward rapture. A look of her eloquent eyes, an affectionate pressure of her dainty little hand, spoke from her heart to his, and from his back again to hers, and gave greater assurance than any mere words could have given that all was right between them. Love's most sympathetic revealings find expression in the fewest words—

"Language can but hint
Darkly and vaguely what the spirit feels."

And it so happened, in this instance, between these two exotic existences of Asiatic origin, that had lost none of their native ardour by their transplantation to a colder clime. They were both, as the poet of the "Night Thoughts" says in a now forgotten tragedy—

"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,"

believers in Destiny, and in the great consoling doctrine —that finds more favour in the fairer Eastern clime from which they came, than in the frigid North—that whatever is is right. Mr. Rameses felt an all-pervading happiness in this assurance, strengthened by the indissoluble love —for such he felt it would be, and must be—of Niona. The doctrines of the Sun-worshippers were inextricably mingled with those of Budha in the mind of Mr. Rameses. Believing as he did in the past eternity—past only as regards the earth—and in the immortal spirit in all its countless manifestations of the metempsychosis, he cherished the idea that he and Niona had met in the bygone ages, that she was the re-imbodiment of his dream-love, Lurulà, and as such would be made known to him in the day when their fates should be once again united in the mystic bonds of the marriage of souls—that had dwelt bodily apart, but had never been actually separated.

When the news of the engagement of Mr. Rameses to the fair Niona reached the ears of Lady Stoney-Stratford and the members of her family, as it speedily did, the mind of the match-making mother was greatly perturbed. She affected to think, and strove to persuade her husband to

agree in her opinion, that Mr. Rameses was indubitably crazy, and that Lady Maud, or Lady Ethel, on whichever of the two the choice of the princely millionaire might ultimately have fallen, had had a lucky escape. That either of her daughters should have married one whom she considered to be a lunatic, however harmless the craze of the lunatic might be, was a consummation not to be thought of without paint; though, possibly, if the wealth of the supposed lunatic could have been shared with one of her daughters, and the supposed lunatic himself were safely locked up in an asylum, or otherwise taken care of, the consummation would not have been considered so very dreadful. But she did not confide these thoughts even to her husband, and contented herself with expressing to him and to her daughters, as well as to her most intimate friends, that Lady Maud, the one whom she had more particularly designated as the future Lady Maud Rameses, had had a very fortunate deliverance from an awkward entanglement. But this by-play did not deceive the world in which she moved like a star of the second magnitude, and did not even deceive herself; and she could not but envy the good fortune of the Indian lady, and even condescended to hate

her for the good fortune which had settled in the hands of one who, she thought, was not fitted to prize it. The Earl himself, though mercenary, was not so ultra-mercenary as his wife, and had no taste or genius for match-making, or desire for the marriage of his two remaining daughters. Next to the possession of many acres, in addition to those of which he was already the lord, he prized the love and society of his daughters, and would have felt better pleased if Lady Gwendoline had escaped Mr. Pigram Fitzgerald, even if she had not been the fortunate means of a more honourable alliance with Mr. Rameses. The marriage with Mr. Fitzgerald, though it had enabled him to borrow money of that financial potentate, had not added to his own domestic happiness, and had certainly been the cause of unhappiness to his daughter. The union of the proud patrician gentlewoman with the vulgar and proud plebeian, who was not, and could not become a gentleman—though he might aspire to become a baronet or a baron—was by no means a fortunate one. It was unhappy in its inception and in its progress, and threatened to become intolerable to the lady, who had sold her youth and beauty for the gold acquired by the Methuselah Pills,

of which she could not think without loathing. By degrees the loathing fastened upon her husband, and the pride of the one at fierce war with the equal pride of the other, produced a state of mutual exasperation. This growing antipathy of Lady Gwendoline threatened every day to become explosive, and to scandalize the upper and mid-upper circles of fashionable Society, and to increase the sale of the scandal-mongering newspapers that pander to the curiosity of the vulgar. High and low, in ever increasing numbers, gloat over the details of matrimonial infelicity that come before the law courts, after having percolated through the unretentive sieves of dinner and tea parties. People who have few ideas in their heads, love to hear or to read of the quarrels of married people, and the illicit pleasures and divergencies from the right path of dissolute unmarried women. The similar divergencies of unmarried, or even of married, men, excite no particular curiosity, and are held to be matters of such trivial import as to be unworthy of prolonged and serious notice. Such, unfortunately, are the notions of modern Society.

Mr. Rameses was a connoisseur in diamonds and other precious stones. He possessed a store of them which

had been worn by the Begum, his mother, and which he had inherited. He seldom looked at them, except to satisfy himself that they were still safe in his possession. He did not prize them for their intrinsic value—as estimated by pounds sterling—but admired them for their lustre and beauty, which he thought they derived immediately from the concentration of the sun's rays. He believed that every diamond was, in fact, a quintessence of the solar light that had been poured into it during countless ages, ere the dry land of the globe assumed its present forms and ere the engulphing ocean swept over the dead and buried civilizations that existed on the planet, for hundreds for thousands of years, before the plains of his native India became habitable ; and when, perhaps, a superior, or it might be an inferior, race of human beings lived to propagate their kind—to sin, to suffer, and to die—and to be succeeded by countless generations, neither better nor worse than themselves. Holding these notions, he looked upon diamonds with an almost religious reverence—not for their beauty and scarcity alone, but for what he considered to be their sanctity.

In like manner emeralds, sapphires, and rubies (green,

blue and red), derived in his mind all their lustre, all their virtue, all their glory of substance and colour, from the beneficent and creative light of the orb that gives and maintains life to tree, to flower, to bird, to beast, and to man. They were, in his estimation, less perfect and less lovely than the diamond—which, like the rainbow, contained all colours within its arch—and severally imbibed and assimilated but one of the prismatic hues, of which the purest and most perfect light was a heavenly compound. He did not wonder at the enormous value that men placed upon these gems, though the value was estimated by gross commercial calculations of the amount of gold and silver which they commanded in the markets of the world, and bore reference only to their scarcity, and not in any degree to the sanctity with which he invested them. He also considered diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and rubies as moral and psychical emblems of the best emotions of the human mind. Emeralds he considered as the representatives and inspirers of HOPE—greener than the first leaves of the Spring, that gave promise and certainty of the Summer bloom and the Autumnal fruit; Sapphires—blue as the skies of the tropics —as the emblems of FAITH; and Rubies—red as the sympa-

thetic blood or the heart of innocence—as emblems of CHARITY; but Diamonds—as concentrating within them all the colours that formed the divine light of the sun—as the emblems of true RELIGION.

With all these fancies in possession of his mind, he proceeded, on the evening of the day when he became fully assured that the beautiful Niona returned the love he bore her, to examine the contents of the strong box in which his mother's jewels were carefully and securely deposited. No one—not even his private secretary, or his intimate friend Mr. De Vere—knew or suspected the existence of this treasure, and not Mr. Rameses himself knew its pecuniary worth. His design was to make a selection of the most beautiful and costly of the gems, to present to his bride elect, in addition to the comparatively valueless engagement ring, of which custom and fashion exact the gift from all upper and middle-class bridegrooms. Most men, whether rich or poor, and possibly all women without exception of the strongest-minded, have been dazzled with the splendour of diamonds. Their principal value, however, in the philosophic eyes of Mr. Rameses was that these gems had belonged to and adorned the person of his

mother, and that they were to be his love-gift to his bride.

Having made his selection, Mr. Rameses put the valuable articles into a common travelling-bag, and having ordered his carriage, proceeded to the house of Sir Hector MacTavish, to seek an interview with Niona. He found her alone, sitting before a harp, amid the strings of which her fairy fingers had been idly wandering, without purpose of melody or harmony, but producing both, in wild, weird, and fitful snatches of sweet sound.

She was a skilful and accomplished performer on that graceful instrument, which is far too much neglected by the ladies of the present day, who prefer the pianoforte as less trying to the touch of their nimble fingers. The echoes of the last notes of the chords which she had unconsciously struck still sounded on his ears as he entered the apartment. He bore in his hand a packet, which, wrapped in paper, he had taken from the travelling bag, and placed it on a little table, with a small vase of flowers upon it, that stood within reach of her hand. "I have come," he said, as she rose gracefully from her seat and advanced to meet him, "to ask your acceptance of a

trinket or two, which I hope you will do me the honour of wearing, for the adornment of your fair brow and bosom in token and earnest of the faith we have plighted to each other—by our eyes, by our silence, by the pressure of our hands, and by the sympathy which envelopes and possesses us both." And as he spoke he undid the loosely-fastened packet, and took out an oblong case of finely-carved ivory, tastefully inlaid with gold, which he opened, and disclosed a superb necklace of large emeralds of the purest lustre, and held it out for the inspection of Niona. Her dark eyes sparkled at the sight, and his, as if catching the contagion of admiration, glowed momentarily with a light which gems of any kind had never before kindled in them.

"Wear this," he said; "it is the emblem of *Hope*—of hope to cheer your spirits should they be depressed, as I, in beholding it, hope that they never will be during our earthly union, and which they cannot be in that immortal union which shall be yours and mine, as we mount and mount, and fly and fly to the eternal beatitudes of Amrita."

And next, opening an ivory case of similar material and workmanship to the first, he displayed a still finer necklace

of the purest sapphires, worth a monarch's ransom. "Wear this, if doubt of God's goodness should ever throw a shadow over thy soul. It is the emblem of *Faith*—of Faith in thyself, in thy fellow-creatures, and in the Divine Ruler and Creator of the Universe." And, scarcely giving her time for admiration or for reply, he produced the third necklace for her acceptance—the necklace of rubies. "These rare gems," he said, placing it in her hands, "are the emblems of *Charity*. To look at them inspires sympathy with erring and suffering humanity, and a desire to remove sorrow from the hearts of the sorrowful, to feed the hungry, to console the sad, to help the feeble, and to think well of the world and of all the creatures that inhabit it—from man who calls himself the lord of it, down to the fishes in the seas and rivers, and to the four-footed, the winged, and the crawling creatures of the land, who are as much the children of God as he claims to be. Last of all," he continued, opening a still larger casket, and displaying a diadem of brilliants, such as the Queen of Sheba or Cleopatra of Egypt would have thought herself rich in possessing—"this," he said, in more serious and solemn tones than when he spoke of the occult virtues of his previous gifts,

" is the emblem of the vivifying rays of the Sun, through whom you and I worship the great God, whose visible agent he is in this poor little world in which we are temporarily imprisoned, and to all the mightier orbs that revolve around and receive light, health, and beauty from his beams. It was holy in the estimation of my mother, from whom I received it, and is holy to me, its present possessor. Let it be holy to you, to whom I consign it in sanctification of our union, and may it bring you, oh! my love, joy in this world, peace and joy in other worlds, for ever and evermore!"

Niona gazed with speechless admiration at all these treasures as they were severally disclosed to her sight, and listened at first with almost breathless attention to the fervent eulogies of their supposed virtues rather than of their real beauty, which Mr. Rameses, in the heat of his enthusiasm, addressed to her. When at last she found words to express the crowd of emotions and thoughts that struggled upon her tongue for utterance, her words—grouping themselves into half-formed sentences—were more eloquent in the effect they produced upon the mind of Mr. Rameses than his far more eloquent words had impressed upon her.

She was bewildered, but he was calm and collected, as it needed not words, but only looks, to convey to the sympathetic intelligence of his mind meanings of even more divine, though occult import, than human language could command.

"Let me," said Mr. Rameses, taking the superb diadem in his hand, and bringing it nearer to the upturned face of Niona, "place this upon your head, as a symbol alike of our faith to each other and to God, that I may see how well it becomes you."

Niona bent her head reverently down while Mr. Rameses, waving aside the abundant tresses of her jet-black hair, adjusted the jewel around her brow. Then, stepping back a couple of paces, that he might better contemplate the effect, he whispered his fervent admiration for herself rather than for the bauble with which he had adorned her, the two words, "Divinely beautiful!" "Will you not judge for yourself?" he added. Taking her unreluctant hand, he guided her to a large mirror—a piece of furniture indispensable to every well-ordered boudoir and drawing-room in Europe—that Niona might herself see how like a Queen of Beauty she looked. At that moment

the full sunshine suddenly burst from the sky—which had till then been overclouded—and fell full upon her form and face. The effect was all but magical to the enamoured eyes of Mr. Rameses.

"It is of good omen, my beloved," he said. "The sun himself sheds his radiance on his most beautiful child, and blesses you now and for ever."

He added in a lower tone, "And blesses me along with you."

At this juncture Sir Hector MacTavish entered the room, and catching sight of the diadem on his sister-in-law's forehead, said, with an objurgation—one of many of similar force and profanity which were but too common in his mouth, and which it is unnecessary to repeat—"Splendid! and fit for an empress! The Empress of India herself has nothing to equal it. Even the pious builder of the Taj Mahal, the model of wifehood and womanhood, and of sovereign princesses, might have been proud to possess it. Perhaps it belonged to her?"

"It belonged to my mother," said Mr. Rameses, "and now it belongs to my bride and wife."

"Long may she live to wear it!" replied Sir Hector.

"She is a good girl, and deserves good fortune. Go and show your sister how well you look in the gaud," he added. Niona, nothing loth, retired from the room for that purpose and Mr. Rameses, taking advantage of the *tête-à-tête* with Sir Hector, informed him that within a month, all parties being agreeable, the marriage between him and Niona was to be celebrated according to the rites of the Christian church; but only as a preliminary to its celebration with the more sacred ceremonial (more sacred to his mind, at least) of the Zoroastian worship, and in the presence of the noonday sun.

Sir Hector started no objection; so the matter was arranged, and Mr. Rameses took his departure with the diminished remnant of his precious gems, a portion of which he reserved for presentation to Lady MacTavish on a future occasion.

CHAPTER V.

A GREAT DOWNFALL.

Mr. Bigraime de Fitzgerald (such was the name he preferred) took in evil part his failure to secure a seat in Parliament. His mental constitution had been to all appearance strong from his youth upwards. He had courage which was all the stouter because he had no conscience. The positive combined with the negative quality pointed him out to all with whom he had social or commercial intercourse as a man well-fitted to hold his own in the more obstinate struggles and the deeper laid schemes of a busy life. But the man who invented the Methuselah Pill, and built up a considerable fortune upon that dishonest foundation, though as strong in fraud and manœuvre as Achilles was in battle, had, like Achilles, a vulnerable point in his heel. That point was ambition. He was greedy to ally himself with the aristocracy—to be admitted to the more exclusive circles of society—and above all to enter Parliament—a door by which he thought he would be

enabled, *ex-officio*, to enter any other society that he pleased. He had missed this chance for the time, and though he endeavoured to reconcile himself to the disappointment by the expectation that on another trial, which he resolved to make on the first opportunity, he felt keenly, nevertheless, the temporary frustration of his hopes. It is true that he had made himself the son-in-law of a peer of ancient lineage, whom he had placed under a load of pecuniary obligation, which would not be easily or speedily discharged. These two advantages he highly prized; but the cup of success had the bitter drop of Methuselah in it, which kept him out of the society which his pride, his vanity, and his conceit—whichever it might be—impelled him to enter, under the penalty of permanent discontent or unhappiness.

Nor was this the only sorrow that clouded the apparently brilliant afternoon of his prosperous life. He was rich, and desired to be richer. Like Midas, all he touched seemed to turn into gold, but the gold, when too closely examined, often turned out to be brass or stone. Anxious to make cent. per cent. of his gains, he rushed into rotten and illusory speculations, and, losing his investments, lost

along with them his self-control, his temper, and his peace of mind. He could not keep his ill-humour under decent restraint, but discharged it in a flood upon the unoffending Lady Gwendoline, who had never loved, and speedily learned to hate him. The loss of £170,000 in one venture by which he had hoped to convert the sum into £270,000 at least, was the climax of several other minor miseries of a similar kind. Like too many other men and women, without mental power, or any reliance on the aid to be derived from philosophy, or the consolations of religion, he resorted to the dearly-purchased support of alcoholic stimulant, and too often came back late at night to his luxuriously-furnished home in a state of brutal intoxication. Brutal is not the proper epithet to employ, and must be retracted, and it is retracted accordingly, for the brutes are temperate and drink water, and revolt indignantly, even in a state of bondage, when men would teach them—as they sometimes endeavour to do—to imbibe fermented and alcoholic liquors. When seen in this state he exhibited the natural vulgarity and coarseness of his nature, and rendered himself more inexpressibly odious to his tenderly-nurtured and fastidious spouse than

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he had become in his sober moments. As time wore on, matters gradually grew worse between the husband and the wife, until, disgusted and goaded beyond endurance, Lady Gwendoline resolved to take refuge in her father's house, with a firm determination to return no more to that of the self-degraded man whose fortunes she had unhappily promised at the altar to share for better or for worse. Lady Gwendoline thought herself that although she had shared them for the "worse," she had not undertaken to share them for the "worst." Insanity brought upon him in the course of nature she could have pitied, and done her best to alleviate; but insanity wilfully and wickedly caused and fomented by his own act she could neither pity nor endure, all the more because the premonitory symptoms of *delirium tremens* rendered her alarmed for her personal safety. One day, as he lay insensible upon the floor of his sumptuously-appointed dining-room, having consumed at one sitting half a bottle of brandy, she called for her carriage, and left the house, never to return to it.

On his revival into consciousness on the following day, he resolved that if Lady Gwendoline should finally abandon his house, he would have recourse to the law for the

restitution of his conjugal rights. For a full month, during which he was every day more or less under the influence of alcoholic stimulant, sometimes semi-sober, but more often wildly or stupidly intoxicated, wishing alike in his sane and insane moments for the return of his beautiful wife, and writing to her from time to time letters that were humbly meant, but that were intermingled with threatening innuendoes that escaped him almost involuntarily, urging her in order to prevent public scandal, if not from regard to her duty as a wife, to return to her home. He promised in the most abject terms to abstain from all beverages that were more potent than water, milk, or tea, and to take the pledge of total abstinence if he could please her by so doing.

Mr. Fitzgerald was of the number of those who always remember an injury—who adopt it, make it their child, pet it, cuddle it, clothe it in purple and fine linen, and adorn it with jewels, who never lose sight of it, and who worship it as they worship themselves. By strict adherence to these self-imposed rules of conduct, they succeed in making themselves miserable, and all who are related to them, either by natural ties, or social and commercial

intercourse. The unyielding determination of Lady Gwendoline never again to return to her allegiance and her husband's home, which neither threats nor entreaties could force or persuade her to modify or abandon, constituted a grievance which he could neither forget nor forgive, and which assumed larger proportions the more he thought of it in his sober moments, and which filled his hard heart with a hatred that would have often manifested itself in blows, rather than in words, on the too frequent occasions when the drink demon was in full possession of such mind as was left to him in his paroxysms. To his threats of an action for restitution of conjugal rights, Lady Geraldine responded by a counter threat of a writ "*de lunatico inquirendo.*" And thus the war between them was protracted and intensified until peace became more improbable from day to day, and threatened speedily to become impossible. Meanwhile, the unhappy man, losing the calm judgment and wholesome control over the business qualities which he once possessed, before disappointments drove him to the treacherous aid of the bottle, suffered a succession of severe pecuniary losses, which cast over his mind, in the rare moments when he

was able to reflect upon the future, the dark presentiment of possible bankruptcy.

Lord Stoney-Stratford had strong pecuniary reasons for keeping on good terms with "old Methuselah," for such he always called him when he had occasion to speak of him to the wife of his bosom, though he never used the epithet in the presence of, or in the hearing of, his daughter, Lady Gwendoline. Deploring the feud that had broken out between the couple, and deploring at the same time the part that he and Lady Stoney-Stratford had taken in persuading the reluctant Lady Gwendoline to give her hand, for the sake of money, to a man to whom she never could give her heart, he endeavoured, as far as it lay in his power, to induce his daughter to listen more favourably to the overtures of reconciliation made from time to time by her husband when he was sober, and to his promises of amendment. Lady Stoney-Stratford, who dreaded scandal in the Society papers above all things, and the wagging of spiteful and envious tongues at the expense of her and her family, united her efforts to those of her lord. But all argument, persuasion, and attempted cajolery, were in vain. Lady Gwendoline knew her own mind, and was

obstinate in her refusal to listen to terms of accommodation, and to surrender what she considered to be her inalienable right to separate herself from a yoke-fellow whom she despised when he was sober, and whom she detested when he was drunk. When hard pressed upon this disagreeable topic, she declared her intention to sue for a divorce *à vinculo matrimonii*, that she might obtain the liberty of which she declared she had been defrauded. She asserted that she was a wife only in name, that the intimate and sacred relationship that should naturally exist between married people who were united by love as well as by law, had never existed, and never could exist between her and her husband; and that nothing less than a complete divorce could do her justice, or restore to her mind the happiness she had lost. Her father represented to her that in England, misconduct, drunkenness, felony, madness itself, afforded no ground for such a divorce as she desired.

Lady Gwendoline, to whom this revelation of the law was a painful surprise, became indignant when she fully understood it. Her father went on to explain to her that under the circumstances, the only relief that the law

could afford her was a divorce *à mensa et thoro*, from bed and board, a relief which she had already taken into her own hands.

"Yes," said Lady Gwendoline bitterly, "a relief of which he threatens to deprive me by a suit for the restitution of what he calls 'conjugal rights,' which I would rather die than submit to. Were I compelled by the law, and by physical force, to return to the awful, the horrible, bondage which I have suffered ever since my marriage, I feel I have courage within me to take either his life or my own, if this was the only means of escape from the pollution of his presence."

Lord Stoney-Stratford was surprised at the violence of his daughter. He had known her only as a somewhat wayward girl, rather "fast," as it is the fashion to call young women who catch, more or less, the contagion of masculine speech and manners from the betting, racing, sporting, horse-loving, slang-discoursing young men of the day, and had never suspected that under the apparent haze, or smoke, or froth or scum of her disposition, there lay concealed the slumbering fires of a volcano of passion. He was alarmed at her present temper of mind, and forbore to

exasperate a wrath and hate which he saw it was impossible to reason with, and judiciously reserved, till a more favourable occasion, the arguments which he thought he could employ to establish a truce between the belligerent spouses. What the result was, must be told hereafter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DESPOTISM OF WORDS.

THERE had been a quiet little dinner party in the library of the great house in Kensington, given by Mr. Rameses to his most intimate friend, Mr. De Vere, and his long intimate friends, Sir Henry de Glastonbury, Sir Hector Mac Tavish, and the Anglo-Indian, Mr. Melville. The party, after the conclusion of the repast, had adjourned to a smaller apartment, the particular favourite of the master of the house, when he wished to be alone with his thoughts, or a book, or a scroll of papyrus. Three of the company, Sir Henry de Glastonbury, Sir Hector Mac Tavish, and Mr. Melville, were, more or less, slaves to tobacco, at certain hours of the day especially. After dinner Mr. Rameses, and the philosophic Mr. De Vere, were too tolerant to object entirely to the practice, and usually endured the infliction of the odious fumes with what equanimity they could command. Their friends

did not often put their patience to the test of a longer time than was requisite for the enjoyment of one, or, at the most, a couple of cigars. The luxury seemed to loosen their tongues, to clarify their thoughts, to unlock the stores of their fancy and their memory, and to promote the flow of their ideas. Upon this particular occasion, the conversation had, for a time, taken a commonplace and desultory turn until Sir Henry de Glastonbury, who had learned for the first time the solemn engagement that had been formed between Mr. Rameses and the fair Niona, ventured to congratulate that gentleman on the singular and happy "accident" which had brought them together on the summit of Ben Ledi.

"Accident!" ejaculated Mr. Rameses, on whom the word seemed to act like a spark upon gunpowder. "It was no accident! There are no accidents in this world, or in any other. All that happens is pre-ordained by Fate or Necessity, and could not happen otherwise. My steps were led to the remote Highlands of Scotland, and to the top of Ben Ledi, by fore-ordainment from all eternity, and Niona was bound to be there to meet me by invincible and uncontrollable Destiny."

"Is there no such thing as free will, in your opinion, then?" asked Sir Henry.

"We think there is free will," replied Mr. Rameses, "but in so thinking we deceive ourselves. Appearances favour the deception. We flatter ourselves that we are free to act in such or such a manner, in the great or small affairs of our lives; and when two, three or more courses of conduct seem open to us, and we reflect upon each in its turn, and deliberately make choice of the one that most strongly impresses itself upon our minds as the best, most agreeable and most advantageous to adopt, we delude ourselves with the idea that we are acting as free agents."

"No doubt," interposed MacTavish, "the quality of mind—the capacity of forming the judgment, which in the particular case we may have formed for our guidance, are the result of all the thoughts, knowledge and training and experience of our bygone years. 'Tis these that have made us what we are, and that compel us to decide as we have decided, and render it impossible for us to have decided otherwise."

"This is called fatalism," said Mr. De Vere, "fatalism with a sinister interpretation. But when we come to con-

sider the inherent meaning of the word, it is but synonymous with the expression that people, who would object to be called fatalists, make use of when they speak of an 'overruling Providence'!"

"We are the slaves of words," said Mr. Rameses, "and words, after all, are but poor tools, though they are the best at our command to express our thoughts. Take the words '*miracles*,' '*morality*,' '*virtue*,' and '*religion*,' to which the world has assigned meanings that do not rightly belong to them. What for instance was miracle in the original conception of the word? It signified something to be greatly wondered at, because the reason of its existence was not understood by man's limited intelligence. A blade of grass, a daisy, a rose, a tree, a worm, a bird, any living creature, from an animacule up to a man, from an atom to a planet, are miracles, if we reverently study and strive to comprehend the mystery of their being. All creation in this sense is a miracle. But by perversion and misuse of the word, a miracle has been made to signify something that is supposed to happen out of the course of nature, and in contravention of the laws that govern and uphold the Universe. In this sense there never has been and

never will be a miracle. The laws of God and Nature are immutable. God would contradict Himself, if He contravened His own laws, and wrought what we ignorantly and profanely call a miracle."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. De Vere. "The word 'morality' offers another, though perhaps a less flagrant example of the poverty of human speech, and its perversion by 'civilisation'—which, by the way, I may observe, is but 'town life' as distinguished from rural life, when traced to its origin from *civis*—a citizen. Man is said to be the only animal that has the slightest idea of morality, or makes it the rule of his conduct. But when we come to consider what 'morality' is, and what it means, we find that it is conformity to the '*mores*' manners, customs or social observances of the country in which we live, and that it is a geographical virtue—a local and not a general virtue. It is not moral in England to have more than one wife—or to imitate the example of the Eastern nations in keeping concubines. Abraham, the favourite of God, and David the man after 'God's own heart'—according to the Jews—would not be considered 'moral' if they lived in England in the nineteenth century. The cannibals, a fast disappear-

ing race, who cook and eat their enemies—are guilty of no immorality in their own country. The savages, who solemnly and as a religious duty kill their hopelessly infirm grandfathers and grandmothers, are not immoral in the estimation of their tribes—of whom the young and strong men look forward with equanimity to undergo the same fate when extreme old age and infirmity come upon them. These poor people are consequently not immoral in the estimation of their fellows."

"True," said Mr. Melville, who had not as yet taken part in the discussion. "Jesting Pilate, as he has been called—though he meant no jest—asked what was Truth? And what, we may ask in our day, is Virtue? As applied to women it means chastity; but as applied to men, it means what we call integrity, benevolence, and exemplary life. It originally signified manliness, strength, courage; and the man who possessed these qualities, though he were a robber and a murderer, was a virtuous man."

"Yes," said Sir Hector, "we deceive ourselves with words, and pass bad money instead of good as the coins of thought and conversation. Take 'Religion' and 'Education' as examples of what I mean. Religion is that which

binds or rebinds—a very inadequate rendering of what we feel in our hearts when we acknowledge and worship the Supreme Being. 'Education,' means the drawing out of the mental or physical faculties, and nothing more, and ought properly to be called instruction. The infant begins to educate itself as soon as its eyes can distinguish objects, and when the uses of his hands, feet and legs become obvious to his nascent intelligence. The savage in the woods, who can neither read nor write, and whose only access to history, real or fabulous, is limited to the traditions of his tribe or nation, is often a better educated man than the boozy, brutal, ignorant, half-civilised savage or "rough" who rots and breeds at the bottom of the social scale in most European communities. The savage, so called, educates himself by familiarity with wild nature, by confronting and conquering physical danger, by conflicts with hunger and thirst, by stoical endurance of the ills that he cannot foresee or guard against, and by resignation to the will of the 'Great Spirit' among some tribes, or to the great 'Mumbo Jumbo' in others. In these mental qualities he often rises superior to the vile tramps and mendicants, and the equally vile tradesmen and shopkeepers of our

civilized cities, who cheat and lie and adulterate or poison the commodities which they retail to the poor. It is an abuse of terms to say of any one—male or female—that he or she has completed his or her education. A man who says his education is finished—or, in other words, that *all* his faculties are drawn out or educed—is a fool, and confesses himself to be one."

"Agreed!" said Mr. De Vere. "I consider that every year, and indeed every day, in which I do not carry my education a little—though if ever so little—farther, is a year or a day wasted."

"But of all the words," said Mr. Rameses, "that most people use, without possessing any clearer notions of their meaning than if they were parrots or mocking birds, are the words that lie at the foundation of all our ideas of religion, whatever our religion may be. They are 'Infinitude' and 'Eternity.' We utter them mechanically, without in reality understanding them, except in so far that we cannot understand either the beginning or the ending of the Universe, though we may understand that the human race had a beginning in this world, and that it will probably have an end in it. Infinite in space, eternal in

duration, such must be what we call the Universe, for want of a better word. Matter and spirit are alike infinite and eternal, though matter as we see it continually changes its forms and its manifestations—rapidly in the living creatures that are born and die, in the countless planets and worlds that sparkle in the heavens, seen or unseen by mortal eyes, and more slowly in the structure and physical vitality of those glorious orbs themselves, whose existences are possibly to be calculated—if we could calculate them—by millenniums of millenniums. Man, the Earth, Time, and the Stars are all finite. God, who animates all, and from whom all proceed, is alone infinite, universal, all-pervading, and eternal. Man's spirit is an infinitesimal portion of His essence, and—like God, of whom it is an emanation—it must endure, and has endured for ever, though it manifests itself in material forms, that resolve themselves into their original elements at the appointed time."

"Past and future eternity are but words," said Mr. De Vere, "which imperfect human intelligence employs to express the vague ideas which alone it is capable of forming on such a transcendant subject. Rightly considered, Eternity, in the mind of God, can have neither

past nor future, which are mere measures of Time; but should be treated of by our finite earthly understandings, if we attempt to reason upon it, as one eternal Now."

"But is the spirit of Man, which emanates from the spirit of God, as you allege," said Mr. Melville, "conscious of its existence in the past, before it entered the mortal frame? Our memory does not even extend to our birth and entrance into the world, and has no knowledge whatever of the first months after the immortal spirit put on the garb of mortality."

"The body is a clog and obstruction to the spirit," replied Mr. Rameses. "It allows us a certain amount of mental liberty, fettered by the material organs and conditions by which alone it can manifest itself in its state of temporary captivity; but once freed from the body by the kindly agencies of what we call Death, it resumes the heavenly faculties that slumbered, or were in abeyance, and sees the whole Past, though it can neither see nor guess the Future until it shall again become allied with matter into a portion of the infinite and eternal Now."

"Have you ever reflected," said Sir Henry de Glastonbury, "that the association of soul with body may be what

one division of the Christian world calls Purgatory, akin to what the ancient Greeks called Hades. A state of probation in fact, to fit us for higher material development in its next manifestation in the physical world—in which it shall enjoy greater privileges—be endowed with keener and more numerous senses, and be thus enabled to acquire more extended knowledge, more perfect happiness, and to experience purer and completer love, than was possible to it during its probationary state."

"Such has always been my faith, ever since the gyves and impediments of the flesh permitted me to have any faith whatever," replied Mr. Rameses.

"We are evidently on the threshold of mighty discoveries as regards the operations of the spiritual medium that links all things animate and inanimate together in this world," interposed Mr. De Vere. "What we ignorantly call electricity, for want of a better word, which enables us to conquer time and space in the expression of our wants and feelings, has power over our mind and conduct of which most men are wholly unaware, and which but a few suspect vaguely and darkly. The love of the sexes, for instance, is the result of electric force. Sympathy

for some persons and things, and antipathy to others, that are independent of our will, and compel us to act in certain modes, instinctively, as it were, and in spite of our reason, which is not consulted on the subject, and which if it were consulted would possibly, and, indeed, probably, advise us to disregard and struggle against what it would call our prejudices. For myself, I can truly say that I never felt an unconquerable antipathy to any person, which I have done sometimes, though not very often, without having proof that the antipathy was justified by the character and behaviour of the individual—male or female—against whom the silent warning was given to me, by a power superior to my own. *Vice versa*, whenever I felt instinctively attracted to a person, the attraction was explained and justified by qualities, sentiments, and feelings akin to my own. In this sense marriages are made in heaven."

"Some marriages may be so considered," said Sir Hector. "Marriages that are effected by what you would call electric affinity, generally result in happiness to the married pair. Happiness is not to be expected if this electric affinity does not exist, as in the cases of people who marry for

money or for social ambition, as in the mournful case of Mr. Bigraime Fitzgerald and the unhappy Lady Gwendoline, neither of whom had one feeling in common with the other."

"Yet marriages that are originally made in heaven, as the phrase goes," said Mr. De Vere, "do not always end well. The husband or the wife, or, perhaps, both of them, impair the force of the divine electricity that brought them together, by contact with the selfish vices and contaminations of the society with which they mingle. One or the other may become corrupted by selfishness, by ambition, by covetousness, by intemperance, and may thus impair the purity and healthfulness of the frame, by which the immortal spirit can alone manifest itself through the senses, while it is burthened with a body. Thus the original sympathy and electric affinity which made the marriage happy is lessened, and may be altogether destroyed; and happiness along with it. It is true that our souls are immortal, but it is also true that the body has power over the soul in this world, and when its end comes may liberate into eternity a soul less fitted to inhabit a higher organism than that in which it dwelt during its period of probation.

Hence our future rank in the ultimate scale of God's creation, may be high or low, as we make it in the body. We may sink into the animal or the animalcule, as Pythagoras and other ancient sages taught, or we may ascend to heights unimagined by philosophy or in the dreams of poets."

"Be it ours to ascend, for ever and ever," said Mr. Rameses, "commencing with Heaven, while we are still on the earth; material yet ethereal, body yet spirit, and qualifying ourselves for the possession of the glorified bodies, which we are to inhabit through countless ages, until we became wholly spiritualized, and pass through *Amritsi* into *Nirvana*—made one with the Divinity."

"I should like to know something of your Oriental ideas of Amritsi and Nirvana," said Sir Henry De Glastonbury. "To me, they are words, and words only."

"There are more things in the religions of Asia than Europe is aware of," replied Mr. Rameses. "Things of deeper spiritual import than European philosophy, except in the case of a few advanced minds, has condescended to study, and that were all familiar to Eastern sages thousands of years before the Christian era. It is a question whether the powers and uses of electricity, of the discovery

and application of which modern science is so proud, was not a re-discovery of secrets known to the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, and to the priests of religions of a still earlier time than the rise or fall of these nations. Belshazzar was but the dupe of cunning electricians, and the priests of Baal were the dupers."

"*Connu ! connu !* as the French ejaculate when an old and well-known story is repeated," said Sir Hector.

"The tricks of false priests, in support of their superstitions," remarked Mr. De Vere, "would, if truly recorded, fill many instructive volumes. Doubtless, however, few would read them, or believe them if they did. 'Magna est veritas et prevalebit,' is a very trite, but a very wise saying; though falsehood unhappily is still greater, and prevails more largely. Owing to man's ignorance and credulity, big lies rule the world—have always ruled it—and will, it is to be feared, rule it for ever."

Mr. De Vere was the last of the philosopher's friends who rose to depart, after this conversation upon the occult mysteries of Time, Fate, Life, Death, and Eternity. When left alone with Mr. Rameses, he took the opportunity to congratulate him warmly upon his approaching marriage to

Niona, and to wish him happiness with the woman of his choice.

"My choice, my fate, my destiny, my blessing, all in one."

And with these words the friends parted.

CHAPTER VII.

A MATRIMONIAL THUNDERSTORM.

The ill-omened and ill-assorted marriage of Lady Gwendoline Pierrepoint, was certainly not made in heaven, if judged by its results—but in that other place, not usually mentioned to 'ears polite.' Even if it had not been for that deplorable vice to which the husband had addicted himself, under the stress of pecuniary calamity—which he had brought upon himself by his undue haste to make himself richer than he was—the current of their wedded life would not have run by any means smoothly. They had not a thought in common; and weariness, satiety, and daily increasing disgust, were the speedy results of their intercourse. Matters had not improved since Lord Stoney-Stratford had vainly endeavoured to restore peace, and the husband had hastened the crisis by invoking the aid of the law to compel his unwilling partner to return to a home to which her presence could bring neither pleasure nor comfort, except such wicked pleasure as he could derive from

the sense of mastery and victory, and such proprietorship over a proud human being as a brutal owner of a valuable animal might exercise over his chattel. Lady Gwendoline, true to her determination to meet his attack upon her liberty of action by a counter-attack upon his personal freedom, had summoned to her aid the legal adviser and man of business of the Pierrepoint family, in the person of Mr. Magnus Littledale—the senior partner of an old-established firm of solicitors, who had grown rich in the service of many great families, that of the Pierrepoints among the number.

The object of Lady Gwendoline was to have her husband placed under restraint, as a dangerous lunatic in the first place, and to procure a divorce from him in the second. The first was a difficult task, as the experienced lawyer soon made her understand; the second, in the existing state of the English law, was impossible.

"What," asked the prosaic and calm Mr. Littledale, to his excited and impassioned client, "is lunacy or insanity, madness or craziness, whatever we may call it? Madness has been defined as a constant or occasional departure from reason. But what *is* reason? There are people who

reason that the earth is flat, because it appears to be so to their eyes. Some people are stupid enough to believe that the end of the world is fast approaching, and will happen in a few years from the present time. These are considered mad—as they certainly are in my opinion—as far as that particular point is concerned, though on all others they may be as sane as people generally are who acknowledge that two and two are four, and that a sovereign consists of twenty shillings. Great numbers of people who are, in all respects, competent to take care of themselves, to manage their own affairs properly, to do justice to themselves and to all their fellow-creatures, and who are sane on every point but one—but on that particular point, however absurd, ridiculous, fantastic, and irrational it may happen to be, who become frantic when contradicted upon it—are deemed to be mad.

"I have heard of harmless people, sane enough in the main, who think themselves brittle as glass or crockery, and are often afraid to move, lest they should break themselves. The world is not agreed on the criteria of madness. The great George Stephenson—to whom the world mainly owes the railway system, which has helped to revolutionize the

modern world—was accused of being mad, for maintaining that locomotives could be propelled by steam at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles an hour. Dr. Lardner thought every one to be mad who believed that steam vessels could cross the Atlantic. The late Lord Melbourne asserted that the repeal of the Corn Laws would be an act of madness. Descending from great things to small, I myself was once accused of being mad while travelling in Austria, when I objected to an item in a dinner bill at Vienna, because I objected to pay for mustard as a separate dish, just as if it had been an extra bottle of wine, or an extra *plat* of fish or venison. The same charge was brought against me at Boston, in Massachusets, because, during my stay in that city, I made it a rule, from which I never departed, to walk six or seven miles every day before sitting down to my dinner."

"All this may be true," said Lady Gwendoline, losing patience at the elderly lawyer's prosiness; "but surely there can be no doubt that a man is mad who maddens himself every day by drinking a bottle of brandy, and suffers from *delirium tremens?*"

"Temporarily mad, no doubt, my dear Lady, but not

so mad, in the eyes of the law, as to justify his friends or foes for having him locked up in a lunatic asylum. He may reform, you know, take the pledge, as it is called, and turn from the evil of his ways; and, when the mad fit has passed over, may enjoy as clear a mind, and be as capable of managing his own affairs as ever he was, and incapable of harbouring an evil thought against himself or his neighbour. If you fear violence at the hands of your husband, and have reasonable grounds for such a belief, the law, if appealed to, will protect you. The separation, which of your own will and action you have already resolved upon and enforced up to this time, may be rendered legal and permanent, with all the securities that the laws of the country provide. Beyond this I cannot go on your behalf, nor can you go on your own."

Lady Gwendoline bit her lip with vexation, to hear the staid, and, as she thought, the stolid, lawyer express himself so calmly. But the lawyer, taking no heed of the lady's irritation, went on to say, with his customary calmness: "The case of your husband—if you wish to prove him to be insane—is not a case for the lawyers, but for the doctors. You must get two or three mad doctors—so-called,

possibly, because they are as mad as the persons upon whose condition of mind they are called to pronounce—to examine him, without letting him suspect that he is being examined. They must know his bodily state, and his mental state—his likes and his dislikes, his whims, crotchets, caprices, and idiosyncrasies; and whether any or all of them are reasonable or unreasonable, benevolent or malevolent, conformable with, or in contradiction to, natural laws; whether his eccentricities and aberrations are transitory or permanent, harmless or dangerous; whether they spring from a disordered stomach, or a diseased brain; and, if they should prove to be from the latter source, whether the derangement of the mental functions is curable or incurable. If after examination of the patient—or victim, as he may turn out to be—two medical practitioners, duly qualified, agree that he is insane, and testify to that effect by their signatures, the supposed or real madman may be confined for an indefinite period, perhaps for life, either as a pauper, or at the expense of his friends, if he have any who are able and willing to support him, in a private lunatic asylum. Do you wish, Lady Gwendoline, to push matters to that extremity?"

"I am pushed to extremity myself," she answered," by

the ill-treatment and the brutality of that awful, that horrible, man. I go in fear of my life from his violence!"

"Will you depose to that on your oath, Lady Gwendoline? If you can do so, his attempt—if he make it—to compel you to return to his bed and board will fail, and we can defeat it easily."

"Bed and board," said she bitterly. "I never shared his bed; and, if I shared his board, it was in spite of my disgust. I would as soon partake of the bed and board of a dog or a horse, as of Mr. Fitzgerald's, or Mr. Pigram's. His real name suits him better than his assumed one."

"Humph!" said Mr. Littledale, taking a pinch of snuff. He was of the old school, and used tobacco in that form, as his father had done before him. "Has he ever offered you violence?"

"Yes, he has, the unmanly coward! He has threatened to shoot me—though he has not the courage to do so, for fear of the gallows—but he struck me a blow with his great coarse fist upon my bosom!"

"Enough," said the lawyer. "We shall rid you of hm without resorting to the writ *de lunatico inquirendo*."

"And the divorce," said Lady Gwendoline, in piteous accents; "can I not obtain *that?*"

"Yes, easily; the divorce *à mensà et thoro*, but not the divorce *â vinculo matrimonii*, as I have already explained to you. The law can and will free you of his company, if you wish it, but will not free you of your matrimonial fetters and enable you to marry again."

"Marry again!" said the Lady Gwendoline, her fine eager eyes flashing with the light of passionate hatred, "I would not marry the handsomest, the richest, man in Europe, or in the world, however fair his pretensions might seem, lest after marriage he should develop into a Pigram! No, I thank you, Mr. Littledale—once bitten, always shy. If again free, I should remain so till the miserable beauty that tempts the eye and the lust of men without touching their hearts, if they have any, shall be dried and shrivelled up. No, no! I say, with the French, *vive la liberté*, as something too awfully good to be lightly exchanged for slavery!"

Mr. Magnus Littledale, before the interview came to a close, succeeded in convincing his fair client that she had nothing to fear from Mr. Fitzgerald's efforts to enforce cohabitation; that it would be needless to attempt to prove

his insanity, merely because he had become a drunkard and had renounced the slight pretensions to the character and status of a gentleman which he once possessed; and that she was free to live and enjoy herself how and wherever she pleased.

As a complete divorce was unobtainable she resigned herself to her fate, all the easier for her to do because her heart was free from all the entanglements of youthful passion, or even of fancy, and she thought she had more love for the horses she rode or drove, than for any admirer or possible wooer that walked the earth. She determined to resume her maiden name of Pierrepoint, and, as she heard nothing of the half-pitying, half-sneering comments of the Society in which she moved on her altered position, and did not seek to hear or know of them, the armour of indifference in which she encased herself protected her from being annoyed by any little pellets of censoriousness that might have rattled against her had she been of a more sensitive nature.

Lady Stoney-Stratford was scandalized, as well as deeply grieved, at the unhappy result of her match-making in the case of Lady Gwendoline, and resolved to profit by her dearly-bought experience whenever it became a question of

the marriage of her two remaining daughters. Her three eldest had married respectively a peer, a baronet, and an untitled gentleman of good estate, and though neither of the three husbands was half as rich as the proprietor of the Methuselah Life Pills, the marriage of each was happier than mere money could have made it. She trusted that her other daughters would marry gentlemen, rich and well-to-do, if possible. Better a comparatively poor gentleman, with mind and manners, than a rich boor without either. Lord Stoney-Stratford agreed entirely in his wife's opinion. He was opposed on principle to the match-making craze in which so many middle-aged and elderly women take delight, and thought that love-making should be left to the fancy of the young, and that the old should confine themselves to warning when the young showed a determination to go wrong, and not interfere otherwise.

While he was the subject of these debates in the house of his noble connections, Mr. De Fitzgerald himself, whose peculiar temper and habits did not qualify him to bear either pecuniary loss or contradiction with equanimity, sulked in solitude, or sought relief from unhappy thought in efforts to retrieve his monetary ill-luck by Stock Ex-

change speculations, or equally factitious support and consolation in copious libations. He indulged in them to such an extent at the Hippopotamus Club as to draw upon himself the censure of the committee, containing a scarcely veiled threat that a repetition of the display which he had made of himself in the dining-room would lead to his expulsion, if he did not think it wiser to avoid the catastrophe by resignation of his membership. He was not amusing in his cups, neither was he stolid or sleepy, or languidly quiescent, as some are, but noisy and quarrelsome. The warnings he had received were unheeded, and an altercation which he provoked with an unoffending member, who was quietly dining, led in due course to his ignominious expulsion. This fact, when reported to Lord Stoney-Stratford, increased the repugnance with which the offender was regarded by every member of the Pierrepoint family, and filled the mind of Lady Gwendoline more especially with shame and humiliation, that she should have linked her fate and her name with such a disgrace to manhood as she felt her unfortunate husband to be.

But the end was not yet, and came in a manner that was painful as it was unexpected.

CHAPTER VIII.

FALLING IN LOVE.

MONEY-HUNGER, as has already been recorded in these pages, was the cause of the unfortunate marriage of lively Lady Gwendoline Pierrepoint with the dull and stolid Mr. Bigraime de Fitzgerald. The natural impulse that draws the one sex to the other was the irresistible power that inspired and caused the expected nuptials of Mr. Rameses and the beautiful Niona. The first of these two forces is peculiar to men and women, the second prevails throughout all the rest of God's creation, whether in animal or vegetable life. This mysterious force is the irresistible provocative of marriage and union of the sexes in all times and in all countries. The sympathies and affinities that grow out of it are the sole cause of the passion that civilised people call Love, and are akin to, if not identical with, the occult force which attracts the iron to the magnet. It was this compulsion, and not the ignoble greed of possible wealth or worldly position, that drew the thoughts of the young private secretary of Mr. Rameses towards the person of a

beautiful young woman, whose charms had captivated his fancy, caused him entirely to forget the Lady Ethel Pierrepoint, and led him to believe that another and superior beauty was the light of his existence, and that the world would be utterly dark without her.

Mr. Melville was shy, for many reasons, in confiding the fact of his entanglement to his friend and patron, and when, at last, after many delays and struggles with his timidity, he mustered courage enough to unburthen his mind, he happened inadvertently to make use of a current colloquialism that grated harshly upon the sensitive ear of the transcendental philosopher, to whom he was bound by so many ties of interest and affection.

"You have *fallen* in love, you say, my young friend! But why *fallen?* Love is not a *fall*, but a flight—a soaring—an abandonment of the dull earth for the empyrean beyond and far above the clouds that overshadow us in our mortal state. It is a flame that mounts upwards for ever! No people, except the English, use the vulgar phrase. An Italian would laugh, or be unable to understand what you meant, if you said to him 'son *caduto* in amore'; and a Frenchman would grin politely,

if you told him that you had 'tombé en amour'; a German of a practical turn of mind would be inclined to ask you if you had tumbled into love, and, if so, whether you had escaped without broken bones!"

"Pardon me, oh, my master in wisdom and knowledge! for the wrong word that I have employed. But language is as contagious as scarlet fever, and we all of us carelessly repeat, like mocking birds, the sounds that are familiar to us."

"Be assured," said Mr. Rameses, in continuation of his theme, "that the love which *falls* is only love in seeming—a smouldering heat, born of earthly subterranean fire and corruption—not the divine flame that emanates from Heaven and returns to it. Marriage may, in certain circumstances, be considered a fall, but not so the love which, if it be true, ought to precede marriage, and endure beyond it, through all time and eternity. Love is Heavenly—marriage without love may be, and most frequently is, Purgatory. Marriage without love, or love that has no other foundation than the gratification of a selfish animal passion, is but a base partnership in the commercial business of life, a traffic in lust, an exchange for worldly

pleasure, for fine clothes, splendid adornments, luxurious living, and lazy enjoyment."

"Very true," interposed Melville, timidly, "but the commercial aspect of matrimony, base though it may seem in comparison with the love that ought to underlie it, must not be neglected, unless love and beggary are to go through the world together."

"We must, in this physical world," replied Mr. Rameses, "be subjected to the inexorable physical law; we must eat and drink, have raiment to cover us, though that is not always necessary in some happy climates. We must also have places whereon to lay our weary heads, but we are not on that account to consider these bodily comforts as the sole ends of our existence. No doubt you will think it a mockery in a man so unfortunately and so unmeritedly rich as I am, to talk with such contempt of worldly wealth, but worldly wealth is no essential blessing, except in so far as it confers the power of doing good to our fellow-creatures. The richest man can but eat with wholesome appetite, which he does not derive from his gold; drink with relish until he is refreshed; and sleep until nature, exhausted by toil or struggle, or the mere effort of living and

waking, requires to be re-vitalized by rest. Food, drink and sleep are as truly the pleasures of the beggar as of the king. The richest man in the world can but enjoy a good dinner, a good drink and a peaceful and comfortable rest, and the poorest man, if in sound health, can do the same! 'Man wants but little here below,' as was said by the Persian poet Hafiz long ago, and as has been repeated by English poets of recent times. It may be objected that man's factitious wants are too often inordinate, but that the real needs of his life are, after all, as circumscribed as those of any other animal. The hungry cock that scraped up a diamond on a dung-hill did not need it. A grain of corn, or its equivalent, is needed, of course, in the married state, but the diamond is mere useless adornment in itself, good only for silly ostentation, and only valuable in exchange for food, clothing, lodging, or other physical needs. And, if it be not a secret with you, confide to me as a friend the name and condition of the powerful magnet that attracts you towards her, and whether you feel the attraction to be mutual? Is it one of the Pierrepoint family?"

Mr. Melville blushed to be interrogated on the subject, even by his best friend, but when the question was asked

point blank, he answered point blank, and very emphatically: "It is not one of that family. I have no feelings in common with any member of it."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Mr. Rameses. "They are a selfish race, money worshippers, with whom gold is God. The Lord Stoney-Stratford enjoys gold for the sake of power, as most, if not all men do, but he understands nothing whatever of the duties with which great wealth burthens its possessor. To Lady Stoney-Stratford gold is more precious than love; she is a miserable slave to it, and draws her cupidity along with her, as the convict in the galleys of France drags the cannon ball that is attached to his leg as a sign of his degradation. She has taught her daughters to expect to marry an Earl, a Marquis, or a Duke if they are rich, and if not one of such rank, a man who, if Earldoms, Marquisates, and Dukedoms were for sale in England, could afford to buy one."

"She has, however," said Mr. Melville, "had a painful disappointment in her favourite diversion of match-making, and believes more in love and less in money than she did when she promoted the marriage of Lady Gwendolyne with Mr. Fitzgerald. The thought of the quack medicine which enriched him is painful to her. She no longer holds with

the Roman Emperor that *nummus non olet*, from whatever foul source it may be derived. She has changed her mind, and is nauseated with the evil odours that have offended her nostrils, ever since she began to reflect on the degradation attendant on all who profit by the fraudulent concoction and sale of the Methuselah pills. It is a commerce which she rightly judges—especially since the man has turned out so badly—from which peers and peeresses, and peers' daughters ought to be ashamed to derive pecuniary advantage."

The secret of Mr. Melville's love affair remained undisclosed, notwithstanding the slight effort of Mr. Rameses to discover it. Doubtless Mr. Melville would disclose it when the hour was ripe, or the humour was upon him. Meanwhile, Mr. Rameses dismissed the subject from his mind, as a matter with which he had no concern, or which did not greatly interest him. Possibly, however, Mr. Melville himself was less engrossed with the subject than he at times imagined himself to be, and love did not so wholly engross his mind as the day's duties and the schemes and ambitions of the morrow. We shall see hereafter. Meanwhile fate runs its course, for good or for evil, alike with him and with all the personages of our story.

CHAPTER IX.

A CATASTROPHE.

Call no man happy until you know the end of him, is an ancient maxim, of which the perennial truth receives many tragical exemplifications, in our own and in every other time. Fortune, though for awhile it seems to favour the bold—to load them with gifts, to anticipate and surpass their wishes, to turn their seeming calamities into real benefits, to build palaces for their accommodation out of mole hills, and convert acorns into forests, for their advantage and recreation—is apt to trip up their heels at last, to turn their shiny gold into dull pebbles, and to make their apparent successes the "whips to scourge them." So it happened with "Old Methuselah," as his familiars always called him among themselves, though they took care never to utter the obnoxious word in his hearing. With an impatient unreasonableness similar to that of the French gentleman, in perfect health, who took medicine to make himself better, he was rich and, wanting to be richer, he

indulged in over-doses of speculation, till the result was impending bankruptcy—remote perhaps, but inevitable :—

J'étais riche
Dieu Merci !
Pour être plus riche,
Me voici !

The hale fool brought himself to the grave by medicine, the rich fool brought himself to ruin and beggary by greed ; the first left friends behind him to lament his fate, the second found none to sympathise with him in the self-inflicted collapse of his fortunes.

He had but one apparent friend, in the shape of a real and formidable enemy. That enemy soothed him in his domestic miseries, rendered him temporarily indifferent to the gold which in his cool moments he worshipped. That insidious friend was the Brandy Bottle, the enemy in his mouth "which stole away his brains," made the worse appear the better reason, and converted the grain of the angelic which, perhaps, was originally in him to a mountainous demon—his foe, his comforter, his evil genius, his intimate fiend, who sometimes led, and oftener goaded him to the brink of the precipice that separates quiet insanity from raging madness.

In his quiet-insanity, when the alcohol steeped his senses in quasi forgetfulness of the world and its sorrows, he imagined, in his comparatively harmless hallucination, that he was still one of the richest men in London, that he could control all the money markets of Europe, convert the most desperate financial enterprises into magnificent fortunes, find the means to tunnel the Pyrenees, bridge the Straits of Dover, carry to completion the Panama Canal, or construct a direct line of Railway to China, anything in fact which engineering could or could not accomplish, and for which illimitable money and illimitable credulity were required. But in his furious fits, which became more and more frequent as his paroxysms of intemperance increased in number, he became not only dangerous to himself, but to all who approached him. The language that fell from his lips in his rage was blasphemous and disgusting. During these fits his wrath vented itself in foul anathemas against his wife, which were duly reported to her by the alarmed attendants, only to inflame the dislike which she had always entertained for the man with whom, for the sake of his money, she had consented to link her fate. Her regret was aggravated day after day when she

reflected, as she could not avoid doing, that the law did not permit her the privilege and luxury of a divorce, to which she thought she was entitled by a higher law than that of England—the law of Eternal Equity.

In one of his lucid intervals, with the fear of beggary looming darkly before his eyes, Mr. Fitzgerald bethought himself that money enough to relieve him from temporary difficulty might be made by the sale of his interest in the Methuselah Pills—an interest amounting to three-fourths of the annual profit derivable from the speculation. For that purpose he consulted his partner—the proprietor of the remaining fourth—an operative chemist named "Chicory Doo," who was alone in the secret of this composition, and duly mixed the simple ingredients of which they were manufactured, and who, in conjunction with himself, transacted all the business connected with the advertising, the puffing, and the sale of the popular article. Mr. Chicory Doo was a little prim, precise man, with a round head, a pair of large cheeks, a clean-shaven face, a stubbly crop of thick grey hair, a pair of sparkling eyes, and a nose of which the nostrils were much too conspicuous. His manner was quick and jerky, and the sly and malicious expression

of his face, conveyed the idea to all who had financial or other dealings with him, that, though he could cheat as well as anybody, he was not to be cheated by the astutest of sharp practitioners in the art and mystery of roguery. When shown into the presence of his partner—upon whom he looked with some slight degree of respect as the original parent and founder of the Methuselah Pill, not unmingled with a certain amount of the opposite feeling, for what he considered the coarse vulgarity of his character—he could not but entertain some sympathy for the havoc which, in a short space of time, his partner's excessive indulgence in strong liquors had wrought in him. Both of these men prided themselves on their skill in driving a bargain—both entertained the idea that no one could by any possibility overreach them—both had an utter disregard of conscience and moral feeling, and an abiding faith in the folly and gullibility of the great multitude, who suffered from dyspepsia and its concomitant ills, and who imagined that every quack was a worker of miracles, who could control nature—make old men and women young again—and counteract the operations of time and decay by infallible nostrums. Mr. Chicory Doo knew perfectly well the net pecuniary value

of the pill he compounded under Mr. Fitzgerald's auspices —but, as is natural to all persons who are asked to buy anything whatever by a vendor who has not tact or cunning enough to conceal his eagerness to sell, he grossly under-estimated the worth of the article which he ardently desired to possess. But Mr. Fitzgerald knew quite as well as his partner the yield of the gold mine which he wanted to dispose of, and fixed upon a sum for the transfer of his rights which was high, but not inordinate—though treated as both by the hesitating purchaser. Mr. Chicory Doo—affecting to be surprised at the estimate put by his confederate on his share of the speculation—hinted that the "Methuselah" pill, popular as it might be, was not safe from opposition and rivalry, and that he, Chicory Doo, was quite capable of compounding a pill that would supersede the "Methuselah."

"You cannot do it," said Mr. Fitzgerald. "You may, it is true, compound as efficacious a pill, but you cannot call it the 'Methuselah.' The name is copyright, and will be strictly protected."

"But there are other names as good," said Mr. Doo, with a smile, "such for instance as the Patriarchal Pill. Methu-

selah was not the only patriarch who was blessed with long life. There are Elijah and Enoch, for example, and Noah, and Melchizedek. The 'Enoch Pill' would be a certain success with the English public. With the Methuselah Pill you secure the fools long life—so they think—but the 'Enoch Pill' would absolve them from death altogether, if they believed in it. Enoch, as you may be aware, never knew death, and all on account of his daily taking three or four of the incomparable medicine that I should name after him. By heavens, it is a grand idea, with several fortunes in it! I think, however, that the Melchizedek Pill would be likely to prove more successful. The name runs glibly off the tongue and would insinuate itself more pleasantly into the ear and the imagination of the gentle—and—(don't repeat the word—the credulous and gullible) public. I can and will try the Melchizedek Pill, if you insist upon too large a price for the Methuselah."

"'Tis all very fine," said Mr. Fitzgerald, with a look and tone of triumph—as if he anticipated no possible reply to the climax of his argument, "but you forget, my very good friend, how largely the ingredient, or I may say, the element, of faith enters into the favour which the Methuselah

Pill enjoys in the estimation of the public. Melchizedek—without faith to back it—would have no chance against Methuselah, with a faith behind it that has flourished and been strengthened during a quarter of a century. Faith, as you have heard—and ought to know—removes mountains; mountains of incredulity and opposition. I value the faith of the public in the unfailing efficacy of the Methuselah Pill at a hundred thousand pounds at the very least."

"A hundred thousand fiddle-sticks," replied Mr. Doo irreverently, with a loud chuckle. "If your notions are so extravagant, I calculate, as the Americans say, that we should leave well alone, and that you should refuse to sell, as I most decidedly refuse to buy on any such terms. There is no need for further discussion on the subject. My mind is quite made up. The pill is only worth two or three years' purchase, and I will give no more for it. Popularity is not to be depended upon. Tastes alter—a successful rivalry is always to be feared, because it is always possible—and we live in an age of intense and cruel competition, in which the rule is 'the Devil take the hindmost.'"

Upon this understanding—or perhaps misunderstanding—the negotiations between the two partners came to an

abrupt conclusion. Mr. Fitzgerald was disappointed, but not disheartened. "Mr. Chicory Doo," he said to himself, "is not everybody. There are other fools in the world, though I do not consider them to be strictly and utterly fools—not by any means—but only enterprising tradesmen, ready to risk a little to gain much, and to make their fortunes by bold but safe speculation. The secret and the fame of the Methuselah Pill are not to be lightly parted with, merely because I am in temporary want of money. I shall advertise my commodity, and the devil's in it if I do not sooner or later find a purchaser, and defy the selfish, and, under the circumstances, the dishonest and suicidal, competition which Mr. Chicory Doo hints at. I made him what he is, and by Heaven I will unmake him, if he forces me to it! Instead of allowing him to buy me out, I will buy *him* out, and reduce him to his original trade of selling soaps, combs, hair-wash and tooth-brushes, epsom salts and ipecacuanha, to servant girls, and depending upon the glare of the red and green lights in his shop window for the only custom he is likely to get."

So saying, Mr. Fitzgerald unlocked a secret drawer in his writing-table, and drew out a small bottle of brandy, which

he emptied at one gulp. Under the stimulus he felt himself strong enough, for a few minutes, to attempt to do any wickedness. It was his armour against Fate—and he felt himself invulnerable while under its protection.

Whenever he was in this state of aggressive exaltation, from the fumes of alcohol in his disordered brain, his thoughts reverted to his favourite grievance—the desertion of Lady Gwendoline. Not that he cared for Lady Gwendoline herself, or found the slightest pleasure in her society, but that his pride was wounded by her scorn, and that he desired, above all things in the world, to be able to punish and to persecute her—to make her feel that her noble blood was of no more account in his eyes than his own, which had, in all probability, "run through scoundrels ever since the flood," and that the higher the rank on which she prided herself, the greater his delight would be in humiliating it, insulting it, ignoring it, oppressing it, and treading it under the iron heel of his brutality. When this fit of virulent hatred came over him, he encouraged it by extra potations from the private stores of brandy which he managed to secrete from his servants and attendants, and kept carefully locked up amid his business papers, in close contiguity to

his check book and banking account, safe from all prying eyes and unauthorised interference.

The non-success of his attempted negotiation with Mr. Doo, annoyed him more than he had expected, and, had it not been for the treacherous aid of the brandy bottle, would have preyed still more heavily on his mind than it had done. For fully three weeks after his fruitless interview with his scheming partner, he had not been sober for a single day. His German valet, Fritz, who was accustomed to his violent fits of inebriation, and usually treated them as matters of course, that required only sleep on his master's part, and unobservant neglect and non-interference on his own, to pass over without harm to anybody, became seriously alarmed at the long continuance of this particular "bout," as he called it, and took the liberty of sending for the family physician, in case that Mr. Fitzgerald, in one of his fits, should do violence either to himself or to some one else. Fritz judged it necessary that the physician should appear to have called on a friendly, and not on a professional visit, lest the patient should take alarm, and revolt at the unauthorised intrusion; and this was managed accordingly. The doctor was fore-warned and fore-armed, and

duly informed of all the particulars of the case before he was ushered into the presence of his patient, who was not allowed to suspect that the visit of Doctor Ignatius Druggit was any other than one of politeness. The doctor was an old and experienced practitioner, and speedily made up his mind that the utmost care and the strictest vigilance were necessary, not only to guard against the effects of *delirium tremens*, but to prevent scandal and calamity. He knew all the circumstances connected with the matrimonial disagreements between Mr. Fitzgerald and his high-born spouse, and all his sympathies were enlisted on the side of the lady. It was, he thought, a hopeless case of *mania à potu*, for which there was no remedy except restraint and enforced abstinence, at a water-cure establishment, or in a lunatic asylum. Fritz doubted the feasibility of persuading his master to submit to the discipline of the water-cure, which, if he had sufficient strength of will, he might impose upon himself, and was decidedly of opinion that the stronger arm of physical coercion, imposed by a couple of stalwart keepers in his own house—or better still, in a recognised asylum for hopeless inebriates or other maniacs—would be the only proper remedy to apply to the case. In this

opinion, the courtly and polite doctor acquiesced, and undertook to convey to Lady Gwendoline his concurrence in the views expressed by the valet, and his willingness to co-operate in the necessary measures to be taken for the restraint and possible cure of the patient.

Lady Gwendoline received the intelligence without surprise. She had long been prepared for it, and only regretted that the lunacy of her husband was only considered to be temporary, and could not be declared permanent and incurable, so that she might be rid of him for life. She did not know, did not suspect, did not dare to hope, or, at all events, to express the hope, or to indulge in it, except in the secrecy of her own mind, that a far greater physician than Doctor Ignatius Druggit would present himself—a doctor named Death—to whom all diseases are equally easy of treatment, and who cures them when all human skill has been tried in vain. But that great doctor does not always respond to the wishes of those who believe in him. On the morning of the next day after Dr. Druggit had paid him his friendly visit of observation, Mr. Fitzgerald dressed himself with unusual care and neatness, and, having caused Fritz to call a hansom cab, ordered himself

to be driven to the house of Lord Stoney-Stratford, where his wife had taken refuge. No orders had been given to the servants to refuse him admittance. The pompous flunkey, with nether garments of red plush, silk stockings, and a well-powdered head of hair, was at a loss how to act when Mr. Fitzgerald made his appearance so unexpectedly, and desired to be shown into the presence of his wife. The gorgeous domestic ushered him into the reception-room, leading from the hall, and went upstairs to announce to the family the arrival of the unwelcome visitor. Lady Gwendoline was not within; she had gone out in the carriage with her two sisters on a shopping excursion half an hour previously. Lady Stoney-Stratford did not feel disposed, under the circumstances, to grant an interview to her daughter's husband, who, she imagined, would be in a disagreeable if not in an angry mood, and deputed Lord Stoney-Stratford to act as the representative of the family. His lordship undertook the task with extreme reluctance, and debated earnestly with himself for a few minutes whether it would be prudent to trust himself without witnesses in the presence of a violent man with a grievance. But, as he had borrowed money of him, his lordship though

it best to be polite, even if he could not be cordial, and prepared himself with as much equanimity as he could assume for an interview from which he would gladly have been excused. Mr. Fitzgerald rose from his seat as Lord Stoney-Stratford entered the room, and, advancing slightly towards him, said abruptly, "Do not be afraid of me, my lord, though your people give out, and try to make you believe, that I am never sober. But I am quite sober now. In fact, I have renounced the brandy bottle for ever. I know it does me mischief, and I have resolved to abandon it, once for all. I am, however, compelled to indulge myself medicinally in a little soothing elixir to calm my brain when I get excited, as I sometimes do when I think upon my misfortunes. Excuse me if I take a little of it now to steady my head, and to tranquillize my nervous system." He said this very slowly and deliberately, and drew from his waistcoat pocket a small phial, from which he calmly drew the cork. Applying the phial to his mouth, he drank off the contents in one gulp. "I wish your lordship good health," he said, "and that you will be kind enough to tell your daughter that I detest her." He had scarcely uttered the words when he staggered forward, and

fell heavily upon the floor. His lordship, alarmed and horrified, rang the bell for assistance. The powdered domestic in red plush responded almost immediately to the summons, helped his master to raise Mr. Fitzgerald from the floor, and with difficulty placed him again in the chair from which he had so lately risen. He breathed almost imperceptibly for a few seconds, when the machine of life stopped, and all that remained of the strong man of an hour previously was a senseless corpse. His lordship took the little phial from the hand which still held it, and found a label on it marked "Prussic Acid." It had contained enough of the fatal liquid—it was afterwards ascertained—to have poisoned half a dozen men.

Such was the end of the prosperous man, of the vulgar favourite of capricious fortune, of him who was reported to have touched nothing that he did not convert into success; of one who was greatly maligned, but still more greatly envied; and who was continually cited as an example to all the youth of the little town in which he first saw the light, worthy of all imitation by those who aspired to rise in the world, and were not over particular as to the means by which the rise could be effected.

Lord Stoney-Stratford was greatly shocked and horrified; Lady Stoney-Stratford and the Ladies Pierrepoint were shocked and scandalized; all who were acquainted with the unfortunate man were, more or less, painfully affected for a day or two, when they managed to forget the tragedy and all about it. Lady Gwendoline Fitzgerald, or, as she preferred to be called, Lady Gwendoline Pierrepoint, was greatly affected, greatly scandalized, and, if all the truth must be told, somewhat comforted. It might be an exaggeration of her comfortable feelings to say that she was pleased by the sudden light of freedom that had dawned upon the darkness of her youth and beauty; but if it were not pleasure, it was certainly a near approach to satisfaction, though she could have wished that the man had had the decency to die in his own house, without creating scandal in the newspapers. She assumed the customary weeds of widowhood with a graceful coquetry, that set off her healthful charms to the greatest advantage, and positively thought that the weeds became her much better than the ordinary finery in which she had delighted to array herself, as long as she could remember her own beauty, which was for two or three years before she had

entered upon her teens. Lady Stoney-Stratford, though greatly annoyed that he had insulted the Pierrepoint family by committing suicide in their family mansion, did not pretend to any grief or even regret at the fate of her son-in-law; for though she was a great schemer, she was not a hypocrite, unless something was to be got by hypocrisy, and there was nothing to be got by tears or sighs for the untimely end of poor "Methuselah."

CHAPTER X.

SAADI BEN AHMED.

A CARD was one morning left at the mansion of Mr. Rameses in Kensington Palace Gardens, bearing the name of Saadi Ben Ahmed. Mr. Rameses was more affected than he usually was with anything, when, on his return from a visit to Niona, he was informed by his attentive secretary that the card had been left by a stately person of apparently between forty and fifty years of age, who had signified his intention of calling again in the course of the day.

"The friend of my youth, my more than brother, the man whom, of all men living, I most love and esteem," said Mr. Rameses. "The wisest and most virtuous man that it was ever my privilege to know."

Even as he thus spoke the welcome visitor was announced; and in a few minutes the two friends were locked in a warm fraternal embrace. In a few more, Saadi Ben Ahmed had accepted the cordially offered hospitality of

Mr. Rameses, to share his home during the whole period, long or short, whatever it might be, of his stay in England. They had not met for seven years, during which Saadi Ben Ahmed had occupied himself in studying men, manners, religion, philosophy, and systems of government in every quarter of the globe. He had visited and resided in every civilized country of the world, and in some uncivilized ones. He had become, he said, a cosmopolitan. He had been a Frenchman in France, a German in Germany, an Italian in Italy, a Spaniard in Spain, a Greek in Athens, a Russian in St. Petersburg, a Turk in Constantinople, an African in Egypt, an American in the United States, a Mexican in Mexico, an Australian in Australia and New Zealand, and an Englishman in England. In all these countries he had mixed with the people and lived the life they did, often concealing his own nationality for the sake of acquiring more intimate knowledge than is usually within the reach of the passing stranger, however observant he may be. He had, during all that time been absent from India, the land of his birth, his ancestors, and his affections, intent upon the acquisition of a wider basis for his philosophy than that ancient civilisa-

tion afforded. He had now come to pass the remainder of the time at his disposal in London; to enquire into the present state and future prospects of the greatest and most magnificent Empire in the modern world, and to forecast, if it were possible to do so, the chances that it would be able to hold its own amid the keen enmities and keener rivalries that its prosperous career had excited among the slower nationalities coeval with itself, and the more vigorous nationalities that had grown up since the discovery of the western hemisphere, and those equally vigorous ones that were expanding in the sunny and fruitful regions at the Antipodes.

"A noble and comprehensive object of inquiry," said Mr. Rameses, as Saadi Ben Ahmed unfolded his purpose to his friend, "in the elucidation of which you will doubtless find as much to condemn, as to approve in the new civilisation of the European races that are the present masters of the world, and possibly even more to approve in the ancient and still enduring civilisations of our Asiatic races than modern thinkers are willing to confess."

Saadi Ben Ahmed was provided with letters to the leading statesmen, literati, and the social and financial magnates

of the British Isles, but was in no hurry to avail himself of them, contented to remain for awhile in the comparative privacy of the household of his friend, with whom he had had since the days of his early manhood so many ideas and sympathies in common. Mr. Rameses promised himself the highest possible intellectual gratification from the conversation of the accomplished and experienced traveller. And he was not disappointed. In order that he might enjoy it still more, he was desirous that the Englishman in whose society he most delighted, the philosophical and kindly Mr. De Vere, should partake with him the advantage of drinking at the well of knowledge, which had so unexpectedly began to pour out its refreshing waters at his very feet, and for that purpose dispatched a message to the Rookery inviting that quiet and retiring philosopher to abandon his rural solitude and his darling books, and pass a week or ten days in the great metropolis, in the society that he was certain would be congenial to his enquiring mind, and to his daily enlarging ideas of the divine government of the world. The invitation was readily accepted, and Mr. De Vere, accompanied by his daughter, was, on the second day after it

reached them, duly installed in the luxurious home of Mr. Rameses.

Saadi Ben Ahmed spoke English elegantly and perfectly, without the slightest foreign accent. When dressed in his usual unassuming garb of an English gentleman, which he always wore, except on the rare occasions when he thought it necessary to appear at a foreign court in the costume of his native India, no one could have suspected from his speech or his manner that he was not an Englishman. His complexion was not so dark as that of an Asiatic, though slightly darker than that of most, though not of all, Englishman. His language only differed from that of cultivated English gentlemen, in being perhaps more classical in its phraseology and choice of words than that used in the last half of the nineteenth century, both in ordinary conversation and in books, and freer from all taint, however slight, of slang, or "fast" words, which, in the ordinary friction of society, and intercourse with various classes of the people, too commonly permeates the talk, even of the most refined, and which is not always absent from literature.

The social and intellectual dinner-parties of Mr. Rameses

never included more than seven or eight, or at most nine persons, all seated at a round table, and comprising persons already known to or desirous of being known to each other—persons who had something to say, who could say it well, and who could listen as intelligently as they could talk. No habitual "funsters" or punsters, or professional wits, and no "wet blankets," were admitted to his symposia, but only people who were willing to teach or to be taught, to imbibe knowledge gratefully, or to impart it cheerfully and unpretentiously, and even unconsciously—to converse, not to preach or lecture. Acting upon this principle, he took an early opportunity after the arrival of his friend Saadi Ben Ahmed to invite four friends to meet him and De Vere, who would all, he thought, be interested in hearing the opinions of so observant and thoughtful a student of mankind in all quarters of the globe. These were Lord Stoney-Stratford, Sir Henry de Glastonbury, Sir Hector MacTavish, and General Jefferson Trelawny, a Virginian gentleman who had fought as a private soldier in General Lee's army during the American Civil War from 1863 to 1865, and was one of the few Southern gentlemen who had escaped

without absolute pecuniary ruin on the collapse of that cause in 1865. To these were added Mr. Melville, the private secretary, making eight in all. General Trelawny was a comparatively recent acquaintance of Mr. Rameses, and a very favourable specimen of what is called in the United States the "chivalry of the South"—a man without any strongly-defined American prejudices, and who prided himself on his purely English ancestry, without any admixture of Irish, German, or even of New England, or what he persisted in calling "Yankee," blood.

The two Asiatics were philosophers, but each had a different bent of mind. Mr. Rameses dwelt upon spiritual matters, and strove to fathom unfathomable mysteries of this life and the next. Saadi Ben Ahmed, on the contrary, was of a practical turn, and studied the things of this world, as well as he was able, and was a keenly intelligent observer of human nature, both in the individual man, and in the aggregation of men of which nations and races are composed, and loved to speculate upon the probable course of the future by the study of the past. Yet each displayed a vivid interest in the speculations of the other. Their

opinions took divergent courses, but were not antagonistic. As a great painter may delight in the strains of a great musician, without being able to rival him in their production, so Saadi Ben Ahmed took a sincere pleasure in the sublime dream of the infinite progress and development of the soul in the inscrutable hereafter, in which Mr. Rameses indulged; and Mr. Rameses, while fascinated by his faith in the future life, was not utterly insensible to the demands made upon his time and thought by the more prosaic interests of the present life. The one was a mystic —the other was a realist; but they did not hate each other on that account, as they might possibly have done had they been jealous devotees of antagonistic, or even of slightly different, religious creeds—a species of hatred not quite unknown even to the present comparatively tolerant generation, but which was not considered hatred at all, but a high degree of Christian love and charity, by our super-eminently Christian ancestors.

A friendly discussion arose among the friends and guests of Mr. Rameses, on their first meeting with Saadi Ben Ahmed at the hospitable board of their entertainer, with the object of eliciting the opinions of that intelligent and

observant traveller on the present state and prospects of the civilized world. The choice viands and choicer wines had been duly and leisurely partaken of, flavoured by pleasant desultory conversation, which had made the convives known more or less to each other. Though it may be humiliating to the pride of a spiritual and transcendental philosopher to admit the fact, it must be confessed that nothing conduces more readily and happily among men to open the fountains of mutual confidence—to unloose "the hinges of the tongue"—than the genial conviviality of the dinner-table, where the guests are all intelligent and well-met, and where the surroundings are such as to please, not only the palate, but the eye and the fancy. A chance word spoken without purpose may in such company prove to be a key to open up the closed receptacles of thought, or to roll off the imprisoning stone from the well of knowledge, and that word was spoken by General Jefferson Trelawny, a representative of the best class of American statesmen and gentlemen. "We have a great deal too much liberty in America," said he; "we allow ignorant negroes, and equally ignorant white blackguards, to share in the government of the country by means

of the political power which they exercise by their votes for the legislature, and for the choice of the President."

"That is not liberty," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, "but an abuse of liberty. No word except religion is so little understood in the modern world as liberty. Of liberty, in the true sense of the word, the liberty to live, to labour and to enjoy the fruits of labour, without coercion, or oppression, or injustice from any quarter, there cannot be too much. But of the liberty accorded to the ignorant many to govern the intelligent few, there cannot be too little. It is this kind of liberty, falsely so-called, that is the curse of America, of Great Britain, of France, and of all ultra-democratic countries. There must be restrictions upon liberty, if true liberty is to exist."

"Exactly so!" said Sir Hector MacTavish. "Liberty given to the selfish and grovelling mob to govern the select body of thinkers is an oppression and a tyranny. It is a mistake altogether, and operates to the disadvantage and degradation of society. We might as well permit the votes of children in the nursery to be given in the selection of those who are to rule them for their good, as to give the privilege of voting for the statesmen and legislators who

are to govern a great nation, to the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, who have not an idea in their heads unconnected with their vulgarest physical necessities. Enough for them to have liberty to live and thrive, without endowing them with the privilege of governing their superiors.'

"The world in our day is in all its political relations," remarked Mr. De Vere, "but one great city, of which the various countries and nationalities are but streets, or parishes, of varying sizes and importance. In these streets or parishes, the majority of the inhabitants—engrossed in the daily struggle for subsistence—do not know, or do not care to examine, whether the little portion of the city, or the world, in which they are primarily interested—whether the conflagration raging in the next street may not extend to their own shops, and affect their property, their business, and even their lives, who turn a deaf ear to the entreaties and remonstrances of the wiser few who know and would guard against the danger, lest any effort they might make with the fire-engines would take them from their shops, or render them liable to a tax of a shilling in the pound on their incomes."

"Such," said Sir Henry De Glastonbury, "is the condi-

tion of the once great English nation under the regime of the multitude, who have governed England since Mr. Gladstone's malignant Reform Bill came into operation; and will continue to govern it, until England is reduced to a third-rate power, and the sceptre of her supremacy is snatched from her hands by the United States, or by her own giant colonies. This old lion has become toothless, as I once heard an American orator say, and has not the courage to wag his mangey tail in anger, lest it should drop off!"

"Not a true or representative American," said General Trelawny, "but a 'Yankee'—a veritable, unmistakable Yankee, whose vulgarity, conceit, ignorance, and presumption bring our country into discredit."

"An irreverent joke, with only too much truth to support it," interposed Lord Stoney-Stratford.

"What I have observed in England and in America," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, "as the deleterious and uncomfortable concomitant of the false notions of liberty inculcated into the minds of ignorant people, is the craze for what is falsely called 'equality.' I have nothing to say against the equality of all men and women in the sight of God and the Law. The law, in all civilised countries of modern

times—though not, I regret to confess, in ancient times—is bound to treat, and does treat, the poorest and humblest with the same strict justice as it does the highest and richest."

"But Law," interposed Mr. De Vere, "is much too costly, and weighs more heavily on the poor than on the rich—so heavily on the former as virtually to amount to a denial of justice."

"This is doubtless a misfortune," replied Saadi Ben Ahmed; "but where is the remedy, if lawyers expect to live by their profession? The costliness of law, however, affects the question of the recognised equality of all men before it. But the mischief is, in such ultra-democratic countries as Great Britain and the United States and the colonies of Great Britain, that legal equality is held to include social equality, which is a very different thing. Legal equality is of possible establishment; but social equality is impossible. The fool is not the social equal of the wise man, the robber and brigand of the honest man, the servant of him who pays for service and exacts it, nor the ignorant and brutal boor of the educated and refined gentleman."

"In England," said Lord Stoney-Stratford, "the excess

of what is falsely called liberty—which is the curse of the country, as it is of America—fills the minds of the vulgar with conceit and arrogance, that would be considered amusing if they were not disgusting. The coarsest kitchen drab and scullion considers herself affronted if people of her own rank and station do not address her as a 'lady.' If she receives a letter she must be addressed as 'Miss.' Shop-girls are no longer existent—they are shop-*ladies*. Drapers' assistants, or counter-jumpers, are 'gentlemen.' There are no longer 'men' or 'women' in the language of the ultra-democracy, but 'gentlemen' and 'ladies.' Even the good, honest, noble word of 'wife' is superseded, on the tongues of the superfine vulgar, by 'lady' or 'Missus.' 'Workman' is considered a title of disrespect, and has mostly given place to 'operative,' as more 'genteel' and 'respectable.' The title of 'Mr.,' instead of 'Esquire,' on a letter, is held to be an affront by proud shopkeepers who receive it, and meant as such by him who sends it. Domestic servants scorn to wear the plain garments that were good enough for their ancestors, and array themselves in cheap, tawdry, and flimsy finery, of the fashion of that worn by their mistresses, so that when they walk abroad

they may not appear to be what they are, but as the equals in rank to their mistresses, whose style and manner 'they imitate so abominably'—daws in the plumage of a peacock, asses in the hide of the lion, unable to conceal their long ears, or to make other utterance than a braying whenever they open their mouths."

"All these things," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, "are of minor importance compared with the pretension of those vulgar and ignorant people, male and female, who think that, because personal freedom is their right, they have a right to govern, or help to govern, others. This imaginary right has no more foundation in Nature and reason than the right of young children to govern their fathers and mothers, and to share in the government of great states, and of the world, of which all states and empires form a part. Yet it is foolishly conceded and acted upon by the shallow empirics, who think that the voice of the people is the voice of God, and who appeal to the multitude to decide questions which the multitude cannot and never will be able to understand. The ultra-democrats who think themselves wise, are in reality the greatest of political fools. They do not know that liberty

rests upon restrictions. Every right has its limitations, and must have them. Every man and woman has a right to dress as he or she pleases, but no man or woman has a right, in our present state of civilization, to walk naked in the streets. Every man has a right to his own life, if he can maintain it by his labour or skill, or usefulness to society, but he has no right to take the life of another. Every one has the natural right to govern himself, but no natural right to govern anybody else. Modern political empirics and defenders of an abstract but impossible liberty, think the contrary, and in Great Britain and Ireland, France, the United States, and the British Colonies, have given the *privilege*, which they wrongfully call and consider a *right*, to the government of his fellows—inferiors, it may be, but more often superior to himself—to every one who has a fixed abode, though it may be but a hut or a wigwam. The result is the government of a large portion of the modern world by the necessarily uninstructed, toiling, and unintellectual multitude, living by their daily work, and having neither time nor mind to study and understand the mighty issues of national weal or woe, glory or shame, which may depend on their suffrages."

"It is the greatest mistake of modern times," said Mr. De Vere, "to consider the electoral suffrage as a right, and as a necessary consequence to extend it, until within the now more or less restricted circle shall be included children, and paupers, if not felons and lunatics. The privilege—I will not outrage my conscience by calling it right—having been granted, with the restrictions I have enumerated, the question for the future consideration of wise and far-seeing statesmen will be that of restricting it without, however, going so far as to abolish it, which is now impossible; allowing household suffrage to prevail, and even extending it if need be, to manhood and womanhood suffrage. I would restrict it very considerably."

"To restrict the suffrage now, after Mr. Gladstone's ill-judged, though apparently necessary, extension of it," said Sir Henry De Glastonbury, "would be perilous—even if it were possible."

"Neither perilous nor impossible," replied Mr. De Vere, "nor even unpopular, if cleverly managed. Allowing the right—if the multitude so consider it—to remain, what would be more easy than to purify its exercise by exclusion from the privilege of enjoying it, not only of the criminals

undergoing penal sentences of imprisonment, but of those minor offenders against the well-being of society whose offences do not amount to felony? For instance, I would deprive of the suffrage every shopkeeper legally convicted of adulterating the food, the drink, or the medicines which he retails to the public. This would act very beneficially if the penalty of disfranchisement extended for a term of years, say three or seven, after legal conviction of such offences. I would apply the same rule to all traders who should be convicted of selling by false weights and measures."

"Would you not extend it to persons convicted of cruelty to children and wife-beating, if sentenced for these offences by a magistrate?" enquired General Trelawny.

"Undoubtedly I would," replied Mr. De Vere, "and to swindlers, robbers, forgers, and all felons whatsoever, for at least seven years after the expiry of their ordinary terms of punishment."

"What a revolution and a purification that would be!" said Lord Stoney-Stratford. "And so cunningly devised, moreover, that the sticklers for an extended suffrage could not object that it was hostile to their darling principle. It would reduce the electoral lists of the whole country,

urban and rural, by at least twenty-five per cent., and from every four million of 'free and independent electors' strike off one million as disqualified to have a voice in the government of honest men."

"I think we are all pretty well agreed upon the question. But I will go further than most of you," said Saadi Ben Ahmed. "I express a decided opinion that the privilege of a share in the government of a nation, as far as the vote of the individual is concerned, is not only of evil effect on the government, but on the true happiness and well-being of the voter, unless he be a person of cultivated intelligence and independent honesty. The possession of a vote by the ignorant, the idle and the dishonest, fosters not only arrogance and conceit in their minds, but encourages in them an unreasonable dissatisfaction with their lot. The great bulk of mankind in all countries, whether highly civilized or comparatively barbarous, require to be governed—wisely and firmly, no doubt, but still to be governed—by intelligence superior to their own. Left to themselves, without restraining power over them, their liberty always does, and always must, degenerate into licence. Licence grows into anarchy, which, in its turn, pro-

duces despotism, in order that any kind of liberty, guarded by restraint, may possibly exist. Men are naturally dissatisfied with their condition, whatever it may be, and as naturally desire a larger portion of the good things of the world than can fall to their share in their wild and selfish competition with each other, and the pressure of their own numbers upon the resources at the command of the whole community. In the dissatisfaction which grows out of their struggles to live, they are led astray by the specious oratory which they mistake for eloquence. Passion is easily excited, while reason, among the ignorant and prejudiced, is not easily to be convinced. The shallowest of men, if they appeal to passion, can make brilliant speeches, can darken counsel with vain words, make the worse appear the better reason, tickle the long ears of the multitude by empty, but high-sounding declamation, destitute of pith or substance;—unsubstantial rubbish, unstable as water or mist, on which nothing can be erected. The 'gift of the gab,' as it is vulgarly called, threatens to become, if it has not already become, the greatest power in the government of the European nations and of all democracies whatsoever."

"A result," remarked Mr. De Vere, "which is in a great degree owing to the Press, which reports the vapid trash spoken by the vain people of inferior intellectual capacity, who love to see themselves in print."

"As yet," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, "the happiness of the multitude has not been the result of European civilization and the democratic liberty which it has engendered. Turn where we will we see the upheaval of the lower against the upper strata of society, which threatens a social earthquake, fiercer and more destructive than the world has yet seen. 'Socialism,' or the doctrine of the community of goods, share and share alike—by the "haves" and the "have nots," by the idle and the industrious, by the ignorant and the intelligent, by the fools and the wise men—looms largely upon the horizon, and aspires to be the religion of the future. All the religions of the last two thousand years have been established and cemented by blood and misery. If Socialism is to be the new religion, it is likely, in my opinion, to be productive of far more bloodshed than any that have preceded it."

"*Après nous le deluge*," said Mr. Rameses, "but, enough of this for the present; let us join the ladies upstairs and enjoy a little music."

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE LOVE AFFAIR, OR WHAT SEEMS TO BE SO.

Mr. Melville, though not more bashful than other young men, even if he were bashful at all, which was a moot point in his own mind, as well as in that of others (if, indeed, others had ever considered the question, which his friend and patron Mr. Rameses had certainly not done), was extremely reluctant to disclose to any one, especially to Mr. Rameses, the secret of the love passion with which he had become afflicted. He was not ashamed of his love, neither was he proud of it, though, after a vigorous cross-examination of himself, he was convinced that he felt rather more inclined to conceal than to avow it. He had struggled with his more or less oppressive secret for several months, and had at last come to the resolution of continuing to struggle with it, rather than risk the condemnation with which he feared Mr. Rameses and all his other friends might regard it. He was not impelled to any hasty course

of action as long as he could sun himself in the warmth and light of love, not the less ardent because it was secret from all eyes and knowledge but those of the fair captivatress of his heart. He was not, he thought, too young to run riot in the romantic fancies of amorous passion, but he reflected that he was too young to marry, too poor, and too uncertain of the future possession of an income sufficient to maintain a wife in the worldly position in which he aspired to move. While in this state of fascinated irresolution, swayed in opposite directions by glowing fancy, and hard, dry fact, and while he felt that his love was strong and his purpose weak, he bethought himself that he might prepare the way for the avowal which he longed, yet feared to make, if he engaged Mr. Rameses in a discussion upon the faith entertained by that gentleman, that the occult but irresistible action of spiritual and physical electricity was the true and only cause of all our loves and all our hates, and that poor mortal creatures were as impotent to resist the divine attraction as the steel is to resist the magnet, or the earth to resist the mysterious and all-pervading law of gravitation. Was not that law, according to Mr. Rameses, the law which governs the life and

the motion of all the planets that circulate round the sun, of the sun himself, and of all the countless and more majestic suns that exist in the infinite space where the weak imagination, and the still weaker intelligence, of man cannot follow them?

The result of the discussion, which he knew was a favourite one with Mr. Rameses, was a reiteration on the part of that philosopher that all the phenomena of creation were the result of positive and negative electricity, and that they accounted, as far as limited human wit could account for anything, for what are called up and down, right and wrong, life and death, love and hate, finitude and infinitude, time and eternity. "They explain," he said, "the Ormuzd and Ahrimanes of the Zoroastrian philosophy, the representative deities of good and evil, the one of which could not exist or be comprehensible without the other, and which are both absolutely necessary to the government of the mighty worlds in which they obey the irresistible behests and commands of ANANKE or Necessity, the supreme Lord of the Universe, alike the creator, the preserver and the renovator of all that ever is, ever was, or ever will be.

The ideas of Necessity, and irresistible gravitation, and all-pervasive electricity, as insisted upon by Mr. Rameses, were highly comforting to Mr. Melville. He thought them the very perfection of wisdom, principally because they tended to confirm him in his own foregone conclusions, and encouraged him to yield to the passion that temporarily governed his thoughts and moulded his desires. No man seems to any of us to be so wise as the man whose opinion coincides with our own, and whose prejudices coalesce and harmonize in every particular with those which we have come to consider either as intuitions, or as the results of study, reflection and experience. Mr. Melville, like most or all warm-blooded and imaginative young men, in the ages from seventeen to five-and-twenty or thirty, had been in love, or fancied that he had been in love, very many times. He had jilted or been jilted by most of these temporary charmers, and fancied himself heart-broken more than once by the fickleness of grey-eyed, blue-eyed, and black-eyed sirens, to whom he had expressed his homage by letters, by sonnets, and occasionally by bouquets or "posies"; and was no sooner well out of the entanglements—not

very difficult to break through — than he was in with another.

But all these were merely taps, not wounds or even scratches, upon his heart, and were as evanescent in their effects, though as beautiful while they lasted, as the soap bubbles blown by a child from the bowl of a tobacco-pipe. One of the latest attacks of the love measles from which he suffered, was caused by the charms of Lady Ethel Pierrepoint. But the malady was not serious, and was viewed with the most complete indifference by the very aristocratic young lady from whom he had caught it. The next was a little more serious in its duration, though not in its effects, and was kindled by the classic and thoughtful beauty of the quiet daughter of Mr. De Vere. It met with no encouragement, however, and created a disappointment that might have been much more severe than it was, had not the too susceptible heart, or too inflammable fancy of the young man been suddenly and much more strongly impressed than it had ever been before by the overpowering attractions of the new enslaver, who is now to be introduced to the reader, though her existence was as yet kept secret from

Mr. Rameses, for reasons that were satisfactory for the time to the mind of Mr. Melville.

It was a beautifully calm, cloudless, and fragrant summer morning towards the end of June, when Mr. Melville arose from his slumbers, to indulge himself in one of his usual walks before breakfast, in the pleasant wooded avenues of Kensington Gardens. It was but an hour after sunrise, and "all the mighty heart of London was still asleep," except a few early labourers proceeding to their work, and a stray policeman here and there, who had neither a cook nor a housemaid, in all that aristocratic region, with whom to exchange a nod or other more demonstrative salutation. The beautiful gardens were as yet ungladdened by human life, but were vocal with the joyous songs of the early birds that dwelt amid the leafy branches, especially the blackbird and thrush, the "merle and the mavis" of our ancient poetical speech. The well-kept and pleasant "Flower Walk" was as yet free from the presence of the bonnie wee maidens and sturdy little boys, the wives and mothers, and scheming merchants, hard-working professional men, or perchance the lazy loafers of the twentieth century;—a century approaching with

rapid pace to put the nineteenth out of life and countenance, though not out of memory for the glorious deeds it has accomplished, and the still more glorious and beneficent discoveries it has made in the wide and daily expanding domains of science. The paths were as yet unincumbered with the "pesky" perambulators—the lazy nursemaids' delight, and the pedestrians' plague and sorrow. The contiguous, but less lovely lawns, meadows, and grand walks of Hyde Park, were equally and even more solitary, because unenlivened by the cheery and tender music of the birds, with which Kensington Gardens were vocal, and Rotten Row was as silent and untrodden as a Scottish moorland.

Briskly walking in the fresh free pathways, as free from companionship or observers, as if he had been in a wilderness, remote from a great city, Mr. Melville was surprised to come suddenly almost face to face with a young and beautiful woman, seated alone upon a bench, beneath the well-known overarching bower in the "Flower Walk." The fair stranger seemed to be reading a book, and looked up at him as he passed. He noticed that she was tastefully and fashionably, but not showily, dressed, that she appeared to

be about twenty years of age, that she had delicate little feet and dainty boots, small hands, one of which was ungloved—the better to enable her to turn the leaves of the book which she was reading—that her large languishing eyes were blue and lustrous, and that her abundant hair was of a golden yellow, evidently natural, that her lips were rosy red, and her cheeks also, though not of the too decided crimson that chemists and perfumers know how to produce, and that her whole pose and attitude were easy and elegant. A searching though unobtrusive glance enabled him to observe all this, as he passed on, wondering who the lady could be that ventured abroad so early, and impelling him against his will to gratify his curiosity by another look at the unexpected vision. He retraced his steps accordingly, after walking forward for about five minutes, and found her still seated in the same place. She looked up placidly and, as he thought, enquiringly at him as he again went on his way. The impulse was still strong upon him to see more of her, and after a second interval of a few minutes he again passed, and emboldened this time by her quiescence, he took a seat at the extreme end of the bench, debating within his own mind, in what manner he

should attempt—if he made the attempt at all—to begin a conversation with her. The state of the weather was of course the unfailing topic to which most people have recourse on similiar occasions, and it came to the aid of his hesitation.

"A splendid morning, madame," he said, "and as yet nobody to enjoy it, but you and I and the little birds! How delightful it is to hear them?"

"Yes," she replied in a soft, sweet, musical voice, that did him good to listen to, "the dear little things! I often think I should like to be a bird myself. Je volerais, vite, vite, vite; si j'étais petit oiseau!"

"I see you have read Beranger, madame. So have I, and I admire him in many things. But he is too French in his ideas to be altogether to my taste, or that of the English in general."

"I am French myself," she replied in excellent English, though with a sweet little foreign accent, "and you, sir, you are not quite English, I think?"

"No, not quite, I am partly Asiatic and more than half Scotch."

The conversation, after this first breaking of the ice,

became more general, and branched off into a variety of topics, all naturally springing out of each other. Mr. Melville was fascinated, and took no heed of the rapidly passing time—not even of the warning reverberations of the church clocks of the neighbourhood, or of those more sonorous of the cavalry barracks, that told that it was nine o'clock. A few successive troops of boarding-school girls, and of stray pedestrians of more advanced age, taking exercise after breakfast, were more successful in arousing his attention to the flight of time, and in making him aware that his solitude was invaded by a more or less curious and observant public. The fair lady was the first to notice that the solitude had become less solitary than it had been, and, rising from her seat, showed an evident intention of bringing their colloquy to a close. His first impulse was to offer to accompany her in her walk, but he resisted the temptation, fearing that he might give offence. He was bold enough, however, to say *au revoir!*—encouraged to do so by the gracious farewell which she bestowed upon him from her eyes, accompanied by a slight wave of her ungloved hand, gleaming in the morning light like a little snow-wreath, its whiteness rendered more

conspicuous by the flash of a diamond ring upon her finger.

The parting seemed to Mr. Melville like an invitation and an incentive to a future meeting. In that light he regarded it when he repaired on the following morning, early as before, to the shady and flowery avenue where they had first met. He was not very much surprised to see her in the same seat, all alone, with a book in her hand, which she was not reading, and to receive from her a sunny smile of recognition as he approached. He would have passed her had her recognition been less pleasant than it was, but—being young, impressionable, and more than half-expectant of what would probably occur—he took his place on the bench alongside of her, and offered her without scruple the ordinary salutations of polite, if not cordial, intercourse. The cordiality was yet in the early bud, and was to grow in due time into that full bloom to which it usually expands among susceptible young people of opposite sexes who are not disagreeable to each other. At their third meeting their mutual confidences had so far been exchanged that Mr. Melville had given her his card, and his address, and she

had declared herself to be Rose Adèle, widow of the Count di Molinari, an Italian nobleman, who had died in Paris a year previously.

The acquaintanceship thus commenced was not allowed to languish, and was speedily followed by visits to exhibitions, little *tête-à-tête* dinners at fashionable restaurants, and excursions into the country, with walks in the glades of Richmond Park, Burnham Beeches, Windsor Forest, and other popular resorts. The fascination, the glamour, the love delirium of the young man, grew in intensity from day to day, colouring his life, shaping his purpose, and moulding his destiny for good or for evil. The world for him was robed in the roseate light of the beauty of the Countess di Molinari, and the full force of the divine electricity that governs all life in the universe, as believed by Mr. Rameses, so pervaded his whole being as to render him as passive as the straw that floats upon the billows of the ocean, and as little able to resist its power as the tide is to resist the moon, or the stars to run counter to the courses appointed around the sun. But she? Was she governed by the same mighty impulses? Was there any electricity in her nature? If there were, was it positive

or negative, or dormant? Could she love, or hate? or was she quiescent and indifferent, or merely playing a part? Mr. Melville did not enquire. He was whirled about on the vortex of a growing passion, in a pleasant delirium that possessed his mind and brain and whole being, and dazzled him in daily reveries and mighty visions, with the foretaste and anticipation of future beatitude. But, *tôt ou tard, tout se sait,* and what revelations of the real and actual life of which he had become a part were made or discovered by him, will appear in due course.

CHAPTER XII.

UNEXPECTED REVELATIONS.

LEAVING young Mr. Melville to his youthful dream, and the fair Countess di Molinari to feed his fancy with the contemplation of her manifold charms, the arrival in London must be announced of one of the earliest friends of Mr. Rameses, the Vicomte Anatole du Trianon, of Paris, who proposed to make a considerable stay in England. The Vicomte had been in his time what the ladies of a certain class in Paris had called a *petit crêvé* or *gommeux*, and other pet names of more offensive familiarity than respect, and in the sunny afternoon or shady evening of his life he, in the estimate of his friends and intimates, had sobered down into a more or less steady and respectable member of the upper class of Society in that easy-going and brilliant capital. He knew everything and everybody, or was reputed to know, which amounted to really the same thing in the estimation of the world in which he moved. He was a member of several exclusive *cercles* in Paris, among

the rest of the "Jockey Club," and was noted for his unconquerable addiction to the use of English words in his customary conversation, when French words would have been far better. He patronised what he called "*le* sport," sometimes swore "by Jingo," and still oftener "by Jove"; had all his clothes made by London tailors, and sometimes told his acquaintances of the Boulevards *qu'il allait five o'cloquer chez* Madame de Trois Etoiles or Mademoiselle De Labanlieu. He was not an obtrusive politician, but allowed it to be known on occasion that he had no love for the Republic, and did not believe in it; that he thought Buonapartism was defunct, beyond chance of resuscitation; that the French people required above all things a reasonable assurance of a firm and stable government, that they might work and thrive in peace, and that the only possible hope of the attainment of this blessing lay in the re-establishment of the monarchy in the person of the Count de Paris. For the rest he was a brilliant conversationalist and table companion, and was what diplomatists call a *persona grata* to Mr. Brown de Vere and to Mr. Rameses, who knew nothing of his private life, as well as to Englishmen generally; though he was scarcely so popular among

his own countrymen, with whose opinions he had little sympathy.

One day at dinner the name of the fascinating young widow, the Countess di Molinari, happened to be mentioned in connection with some of the fashionable celebrities of Paris.

"Ah," said the Vicomte, with a significant shrug of his shoulders, "the charming Rose Adèle, more commonly known as Fifine, who set the hearts of all the gay young men of Paris on fire two years ago!"

Arthur Melville pricked up his ears, and felt a hot flush upon his cheek, at this unexpected and unwelcome revelation, and longed to enquire further. But there was no need, for the Vicomte went on to say, "She was all the rage while her reign lasted, and half-a-dozen duels, at least, were fought on her account; for the *cocotte* was *coquette*, and her favours, or what seemed to be her favours, were as liberally bestowed as the sunshine."

"Was not this the slander of Paris—the baseless slander?" enquired Melville, with a gasping in his throat and an angry sparkle in his eye, as he heard the woman that he loved, so slightingly spoken of.

"*Qui sait?*" replied the Vicomte. "Paris is not very reticent of its slanders when pretty women who make themselves fashionable or notorious are concerned. I do not answer for the truth of the story, and perhaps I have no right to repeat it."

"Go on," said Mr. Melville, "I have particular reasons for being interested. Was there ever such a person as the Count di Molinari?"

"There was such a person, but whether he was a count or not, is a question that I cannot answer. He who called himself the count was a very handsome fellow—a *beau garçon*—like Antinous of old days, or D'Orsay of our times, but nevertheless it was reported that he had been a billiard-marker, or a waiter in the Café Riche. He was also a speculator on the Bourse, and was believed to have made some money before he came out full-fledged in all the glory of his countship. We don't believe much in counts in Paris, unless we can trace their genealogy, and know them to be of the blue blood of the *ancienne noblesse*."

"Is he still living?" inquired Melville.

"I cannot tell. He has disappeared from Paris, unless he has returned to his original obscurity as a waiter or a

billiard-marker, or survives in the penal settlement of New Caledonia or in the galleys at Toulon."

"And was the Countess di Molinari this man's wife?" asked poor Mr. Melville.

"Perhaps she was—perhaps she was not. It is difficult in such cases as these, to know the truth—even if the truth be worth knowing. Permit me to ask you if you have met the fair enchantress? for she is fair, and a veritable enchantress of her kind and degree. All the world allows her to be beautiful. Even the women who were her rivals admit that much—though with the qualifications usual among beauties who tolerate no rivalry near their own particular thrones, or what they imagine to be such."

The mind of Mr. Melville was in a painful conflict of emotions. The prevailing emotion—or passion rather—was to treat the whole story as a vile and cowardly invention, a calumny, a slander, a tissue of lies, to be utterly disbelieved and resented. But this indignation did not acquire full possession of his mind. It was accompanied by the shadow of a doubt, that seemed to assume more the appearance and shape of a reality, as he weighed and compared all the alleged particulars of the story of shame and degradation

that the Vicomte du Trianon had accidentally unfolded. It seemed to him something like treason, if not positive blasphemy, to link the name of his idol—none the less warmly and madly idolised, because she had been so lately elevated to that height in his heart. Even if all he had heard in her disparagement should prove to be true—which he could not bring himself to believe—he felt that he should be constrained to adhere to her through evil report as well as through good, and to cling to her fervently and fondly in spite of Fate, Fortune, and the world's contumely. But how was he to ascertain either the truth or the falsehood of the story repeated by the Vicomte du Trianon, who he. voutly wished had never crossed his path, to disturb the equanimity of his soul by his ill-omened and mischievous tittle-tattle. How to proceed in the circumstances he knew not. He longed to ascertain the truth—though determined, even if the truth were made manifest, that he would not believe it.

There was no one of whom he could ask information, or from whom he could obtain any hints that could guide him to it—except the incriminated lady herself, and the French Vicomte, who had possibly only repeated parrot-like what he had heard, and had taken no thought or

pains to be certain of his facts—that might be no facts—before he retailed them. Saadi Ben Ahmed, he learned accidentally, had mixed much in the Society of Paris, and was almost as intimately acquainted with it as the Vicomte. Without appearing to be particularly interested in what he might learn he asked that gentleman if he had ever heard of the Countess di Molinari, once a noted beauty of that capital.

"Yes," replied the Eastern sage, "but I don't really know much about her; and the little I do know, or that I may have heard, may not be true, or even correctly fixed in my memory. There was a talk among the libertines of that great sink of iniquity of a fair young woman—who passed as a countess, and who had been originally, if I recollect rightly, a '*blanchisseuse de fin*' or getter-up of fine linen—who had turned the empty heads and still emptier hearts of the young men, and possibly of some old ones, in admiration of her remarkable beauty, and one of whom had rescued her from her low estate, and lavished his gold upon her for a time. Perhaps she was the countess of whom you enquire. She was generally known in my day by the slanderous *jeunesse dorée* or gilded youth of the Boulevards as *La Belle Couleuvre*, the '*Fair Snake*,' or 'beautiful

serpent'! I saw her but once, and certainly thought that the adjective was not misapplied, though the noun might have been. There was nothing in her looks or demeanour that to my mind, suggested the serpent. She was certainly very beautiful, with a face that beamed with intelligence and good humour. A sculptor might well have taken her for his model, if he wanted to represent Hebe, or Euphrosyne, or Venus herself in her first artlessness, before she had learned wickedness in the world of the libidinous gods of Greece and Rome. I suppose, like all young women of her class, she led a brilliant life while it lasted—perhaps it lasts still. I don't know, never heard, and never cared to enquire; though it either has been or will be a repetition of the old story. Fair flowers like her soon lose their charm and fragrance in the gay city. Worn one day on the bosom or in the button-hole of a dissolute man of so-called pleasure, the next thrown down to the pavement, to be trodden under foot, or swept out of sight by the besom of the scavenger."

"*La Belle Couleuvre*," interrupted the Vicomte, "did not enjoy so short a reign, to my certain knowledge. She is still in the very flush of her womanly beauty, and will, I doubt not, yet break many hearts, or at all events impair

and diminish many fortunes, before the final catastrophe of old age and ugliness overtakes her—if ugliness be possible to a creature so resplendent. She has gained many victories in her time, and other conquests are certain to await her."

"Did she not achieve, some months ago, an unenviable notoriety," enquired Saadi Ben Ahmed, "by nearly killing one of her numerous admirers, in a fit of jealousy, by discharging a revolver at him on the Boulevards?"

"I think she did," replied the Vicomte, "but the affair speedily blew over, and has not since been heard of. The false inamorato was not touched in any vital part, and, though the fair one took aim at his head, the ball only grazed his ear. And moreover he was not vindictive—bore no malice—and took the slight punishment as a reminder of his error, and a warning to him to behave himself better in the future, or possibly to beware of *demi-mondaines* altogether. His revengeful inamorata was allowed to walk away without molestation from the bystanders or from the '*police des mœurs.*' She escaped punishment for her attempt to murder the man who had outraged her feelings by showing attentions to another woman. Such is the 'mode de Paris,' that has not yet set an example to the world in these re-

spects, but possibly will do so, in the natural evolution of our remarkable civilisation."

Young Melville listened with intense indignation to this recital—not against the "*belle couleuvre*," but against what he considered the scandal-mongers and heartless gossips, who had either invented the tale, or grossly exaggerated it, to the injury of the enchanting creature who was its heroine and its victim. He had a firm, fixed, and obstinate faith, not to be shaken, in his passionate worship of the idol whom he had made for himself, and an unalterable purpose, growing more and more firmly rooted in his mind, the more it was assailed by the mendacious tongues of society. The fire that was burning in his mind fed upon obstruction as upon fuel, and what might have been but a little spark, if left to itself, expanded into a blaze that might be called a conflagration, so fiercely did it possess his whole being.

It was with such thoughts and feelings in his mind that, on the day succeeding these conversations with his new Parisian acquaintance, he sought the fair Countess, to keep an appointment which he had made with her to accompany her in a drive to Richmond and through the Park, and dine with her afterwards, *tête-à-tête*, in his favourite hostelry, the "Star and Garter."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN RICHMOND PARK.

A LOVELY day in Richmond Park. It is the middle of the jocund month of May. The hawthorn trees and bushes are in the full delicious radiance and fragrance of their early bloom; half a dozen sky-larks are hovering—scarcely seen, but loudly heard—in "the forehead of the sky," over which sail whole argosies of snow-white clouds, flecking the deep blue of the heavens with their fantastic or graceful masses of welcome colour. Nor have the skies and clouds all the music to themselves. From the low bushes and tall trees of the fairy-like woodland come the songs of the merle and the mavis, whose sweet old names the modern English have vulgarised into "blackbird" and "thrush," —as if the names that were known and used by Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, were not good enough for the people of the nineteenth century, and for the money-grubs who think that all verse is poetry, and that all poetry is *bosh*, which is their slang synonym for nonsense. The

deer, so great an ornament to that and every other park in which they are permitted to roam, were browsing in graceful groups, undisturbed by the holiday-makers of the great metropolis, and Mr. Melville and the fair Molinari, the deer and the singing birds, had all the rural scene to themselves.

Perhaps the human lovers, notwithstanding the temporary cloud that had come over the serenity of Mr. Melville's mind, were as happy in the delicious solitude as the birds that enlivened it. Whatever may have been the case with the gentleman, the lady, if not happy in the strictest sense of the word (who is, except in sleep and in forgetfulness?), floated on the full tide of youthful enjoyment of the passing hour, drinking in the admiration that beamed upon her from the eyes of her passionate lover, careless of the morrow that she neither feared nor hoped for, as wholly absorbed in the present as the happy birds that sang aloft in the blue sky. Mr. Melville was not quite so careless. The dark shadow, in spite of himself, came across his mental vision. He believed in his fair countess—whether she was a countess or not—and yet disbelieved in her, trusted yet mistrusted her, longed to know the whole truth with regard to her, whatever it might prove to be, but

obstinately determined to give it no welcome, even if it came upon his mind with the force of a mathematical demonstration. Those lovely eyes! There could be no falsehood or treachery in them, and never could have been any! Those delicate white fingers could never have grasped a revolver, except in playfulness! That softly-sounding musical voice, that prettily prattling tongue, could never have feigned the love that the heart did not feel! And those youthful charms, so innocently artless to his eyes, could never have been sold to the highest bidder for money and diamonds, or any other form of temporary and worldly splendour! The thought was a desecration of the pure shrine of his divinity—profanation, blasphemy, and madness! To look at her was to look at purity, on which there was and could not possibly be a stain; and the evil tongues that spoke in her dispraise, or even so much as hinted that there could be a flaw in her conduct or demeanour, or the shadow of a fleck upon her immaculate brightness, were worse in his estimation than Atheists!

> "Oh! happy love—where love like this is found,
> Oh! heartfelt rapture, bliss beyond compare!"

bliss unspeakable, until the hour of awaking from the dream, the trance, the hallucination, whatever it may be, which, in its soporific balm, steeps the gross carnal senses in divine ignoration and oblivion of the evil world, and all its unhappy realities.

At last, amid many doubts and fears as to the propriety of his taking a step so decided, Melville mustered up courage enough to ask the lovely object of his affections, who sat tranquilly beside him, whether she knew or had ever heard in Paris of a certain Vicomte Du Trianon? The question seemed to annoy her, and brought a flush to her fair cheek and a light to her brilliant eyes, that had not flashed in them a moment before. But these slight perturbations were momentary; and, passing away, left her as apparently impassive as before. "I have heard of him," she replied, her musical voice slightly trembling with what might have been contempt, and perhaps nothing more than surprise, as she spoke; "Heard of and seen him, without having the doubtful honour of his acquaintance. He was or is one of the yellow wasps or hornets of Paris, buzzing in the ears of women, and stinging them if they will permit them to come close enough, and deriving

their whole consequence in the society in which they move from being seen in the company of the gay butterflies of fashion."

This was said with so much scorn on the tip of her pretty little nose, that Melville was delighted with the spirit so unexpectedly displayed—a spirit that seemed to confirm her in the rank of a virtuous woman, to which, in spite of the Vicomte's innuendoes to the contrary, he believed her to belong. "The Vicomte, I have no doubt," said Mr. Melville, who had taken a strong dislike to him for having circulated and given credence to a story that threw discredit upon the antecedents of one in whom he was so passionately interested, "is one of the fellows that take away the characters of women both by word and deed; boast of their favours, real or imaginary; and amuse themselves by retailing and inventing stories to their discredit. 'Oh! for a whip,' as Shakespeare says, 'to lash such scoundrels naked through the world.' But you have never read Shakespeare, perhaps," he added, "and I do wrong to quote him?"

"Oh, I have read him a little," she answered, with a sweet smile, "and wish I could understand him better. But he is above the comprehension of us poor French

people. Too grand, you know! But I quite understand and agree with what he says about the idle fellows who amuse themselves by slandering us poor women, never believing any good of us, and thinking we are all as bad as they themselves are and mean to be. They wouldn't be better even if they could. There are hundreds of such men in Paris, perhaps in London also, who look upon pretty women with as much favour as they do upon their horses, perhaps with not so much. But the horses, fortunately, sometimes kick, and rear, and plunge, and throw their riders on to the hard stones and break their necks."

"And serve them right," said Mr. Melville. "Fortunately, the pretty young women for whom they make fools of themselves, are more than a match for them in cunning and in wickedness, and, if they do not actually cause them to break their necks, contrive to ruin them, not only in health and reputation, but in fortune. Nemesis! Nemesis!"

"What *is* Nemesis?" said the blooming Countess.

"Fate—Justice—Retribution!" said Mr. Melville, "the lord and governor of all human affairs. The predestined end of all things; the righting of the wrong; the readjustment of the complicated; the final defeat of the Devil."

The Countess smiled. "Your words are too grand for my little comprehension. I suppose you only mean that Nemesis is vengeance?"

"There is no such thing as vengeance in the decrees of God," replied Mr. Melville, "but only justice."

"For small offences as well as for great crimes?" asked the lady.

"For all offences, great or small," answered Mr. Melville. "Crime and punishment fly on the same arrow, and never are, or can be, separated—

> 'If wrong we do, if false we play,
> In summer among the flowers;
> We shall atone, we must repay,
> In winter among the showers.'"

The young Countess sighed; a shadow passed over her face, and a tear stood in each of her bright eyes, and made its way to her cheek. But she dashed the drops of tell-tale moisture away with her hand, and smiled like a rainbow amidst the storm. Turning to Mr. Melville she asked him, in her gentle voice, to pardon her weakness. "It is a hard world," she said, "if there is no forgiveness in it."

"'Tis a just world, after all," replied Mr. Melville, "and governed by immutable law. If one jumps from a high pre-

cipice on to the hard and stony earth, he must be dashed to pieces by the fall. Impunity cannot accompany him, either midway or at the end. But these are not pleasant things to discuss, though they are true. We have more agreeable topics to talk about. The world is a beautiful world, after all, for Love is in it, and governs it, or it would cease to exist." Mr. Melville had never yet declared his passion by his words, though his eyes, more eloquent than his tongue, had long ago divulged it to the bright young woman who inspired it and maintained it. But the long pent-up torrent of his feelings suddenly burst its bounds, and swept away all the impediments that had been imposed upon it by worldly considerations, and compelled him, in spite of himself, to offer her his hand, as he had already given her his heart, in the fullest and fondest belief that she was a goddess or an angel, and not a mere woman, and that life would be altogether valueless to him if it were not cheered by her smile, and fortified by her support. The pressure of their hands, and the glances of their eyes, were more eloquent than words to both of them; and neither of them thought of the anti-climax it was to their amorous imaginings, to sit down quietly to a *tête-à-tête* dinner at the Star and

Garter. But it was an anti-climax, nevertheless. The physical nature commands the intellectual; the real exercises a mastery over the ideal; and in libations of delicate Ai Mousseux, which had attractions, not too flagrant or too pronounced, for the palate and fancy of the lovely "Countess." She lived but for the present; thought not of the obstructions that the record of her past life—certain to be divulged sooner or later—might place in the way of her future happiness, rising up like frowning precipices on the flowery paths that she hoped to tread. They were now, both of them, delighted wanderers in the enchanted land, though the shadow of doubt lay more or less palpably on his mind, and the shadow of a guilty conscience upon hers.

Mr. Melville, sitting placidly in the sunshine, looking over the lovely landscape and the winding river—visible from the open windows of the great dining saloon in the Star and Garter—sipping his champagne, basking in the smile of beauty, contented, and far more than contented, positively happy in the present enjoyment, and never dreaming that it can come to an end, does not yet know or suspect—the slight suspicions that he may have once entertained having vanished for ever, as he thinks, in the full

and glorious certainty he has acquired in his easily satisfied mind, of the truth and purity of the woman that he loves —that the tales told by the Vicomte du Trianon of the sweetly smiling Countess of Molinari, so innocent-looking, so mildly angelic in mien and manner, fall far short of the truth—that she is no Countess at all, but a nameless adventuress, who has led an immoral if not a criminal life, and has been consequently shut out from all decent society; that, lovely and fascinating as she is, her touch is pollution, and that the sobriquet applied to her in that Paris that knows all about her, of '*La belle couleuvre*,' but too truly describes her. But he will know it all to-morrow, and more than all. Perhaps the knowledge will break his heart, if he have a heart to be broken. But perhaps not!

* * * * *

The morrow has come. Mr. Melville has been told all. It has been revealed to him clear as day, but he is not convinced. He defies proof, holds it in scorn—rises superior to it; at least, he thinks so. Shall the dead truths of yesterday, he asks himself, if they are truths, which he denies, be permitted to efface the living truths of to-day and to-morrow? Shall the present love be slain by the

mere remembrance of the dead loves of yesterday? Is not every thing that happens or can happen pre-ordained, decreed from all Time and Eternity? Whatever the lovely being that holds him in thrall may have been, and he refuses to believe any evil of her, she and he have become one for ever and ever—linked together by bonds that are strong as the electrical life that throbs through the Universe, and therefore stronger than death or the world. To Mr. Rameses, his friend, his guide, his counsellor, he will open his whole heart, and endeavour to strengthen himself in the foregone conclusion to which his overpowering passion has led him. He will not believe anything wrong—or if there have been a shadow of wrong, it has assumed a false shape, in the slanders of jealous rivals. He feels that he is already wedded in soul to the object set apart for him from all eternity by Fate—the grand, the impenetrable, the irresistible—and his weak body and her weak body must yield to the strong spirit that controls and governs both. Thus he has argued with himself, and determined that all possible opposition in man, nature, hell itself, must give way before him. His resolution thrives on difficulties, and

triumphs over all obstacles. If marriages are made in Heaven, as he thinks—how shall foul Slander and Hell prevail against them?—unless the Hell exists in his own bosom? *There*, however, for the present, he holds all Heaven, in holding the fallen angel—beautiful, even though fallen—whom he calls Molinari.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KNOT IS TIED—AND LOOSENED.

'Tis a fine bright morning in June, and a marriage is about to be celebrated in London. One? perhaps one hundred—or, in all the compass of the British Isles, perhaps a thousand or two thousand of these ceremonies—fateful for good or for evil to the trusting hearts or the calculating heads of the people who ask and receive the sanction of the law to the binding contracts into which they enter. But of these multitudinous happy, or, as they may turn out to be, woeful engagements, there is but one in which the readers of these pages have any immediate interest. It is a small and humble marriage, plain and unpretentious in all its incidents and accessories, and takes place in a Registry-office, before an attorney-like functionary and his clerk. The two witnesses are all but unknown to the bridegroom and the bride, casual acquaintances, in fact, who take but the slightest and most perfunctory interest in the shabby ceremonial. The ring has

been put on the finger of the bride by the bridegroom, both have signed their names in the register in the presence of the prosaic officials and the witnesses, the moderate fee has been paid, and the ceremony is concluded. The bridegroom has signed his name, Arthur Melville, aged 23, of Kensington, gentleman, and the bride, Adèle Dubois, spinster, aged 20, of the Rue de Breda, Paris. By this name (Rose, or Fifine, privately claiming to be the Countess di Molinari) thinks it prudent to describe herself, lest if she assume a designation to which she is not legally or even socially entitled, her marriage may afterwards be invalidated.

There is no wedding-breakfast, no display of wedding-gifts—no stupid throwing of rice, or of slippers—scarcely even the utterance of good wishes, from the registrar, his clerk, or from the uninterested and formal witnesses. The marriage is intended to be private, if not secret, and is quite as secret as the law permits it to be. The bride and bridegroom depart from the sordid office and the dingy unlovely street in a hansom-cab, and disappear unobserved in the whirling wilderness of London; no one knows or cares whither.

Three days afterwards, on the expiry of a week's leave of absence which he had obtained from his customary attendance upon Mr. Rameses, on the plea of urgent private business, Mr. Melville was surprised, on presenting himself before that gentleman, to learn that he had made arrangements to make a holiday trip in his yacht—the Niona, which he had recently purchased—accompanied by his friends, Sir Hector, and Lady MacTavish, and his affianced bride. They proposed proceeding to Egypt, and to be absent for two months. It was his wish that Mr Melville should accompany him on the journey. The secretary received with dismay the summons to travel, and devoutly wished that he had had courage enough to take his employer into his confidence before linking his fate with that of the fair Molinari. That he should be separated from her after three days of marriage, was not to be thought of, and Mr. Rameses, he knew, would not ask him to make such a sacrifice of his feelings, if the fact of his marriage were divulged. So the perplexed secretary, with much reluctance and many sore misgivings, made a virtue of necessity, and confessed the fact.

Mr. Rameses was not offended, though he was sur-

prised at the suddenness and the secrecy of the step which the young secretary had taken. He inclined to augur unfavourably of it from the want of confidence which had been displayed. Mr. Melville could not venture to give any further information on the subject than was conveyed in the assertions not uncommonly made by young and ardent lovers when at a loss for reasons to account for the fine madness with which their passions have inspired them—that the lady was ravishingly beautiful, that he loved her to distraction, and had found that he could not live without her—all familiar asseverations in the mouths of boys whose trust transcends their reason. That she had no fortune, he admitted, but what signified the absence of fortune to one who, like himself, was strong, full of hope, energy and courage?

"'Twas a bold step for one in your position to take," said Mr. Rameses. "And who may your enchantress be? Is she of good family?"

"All men and women are of one family," replied the love-smitten secretary, to whom the question was a difficulty, "good families and bad families are all God's children, and receive God's blessings only if they deserve them."

"Yes, yes, we all know that, or ought to know it," said Mr. Rameses very gravely.

"Love," replied the secretary, "if it be true love, takes no account of worldly conditions. It is the result, as you, sir, in the sublime philosophy with which you have indoctrinated me, of a magnetic force, that pervades and produces all life in this world, and in every other, and that governs the animalcule as well as the planet!"

"Doubtless, my young friend. But when you talk of magnetism, you must remember that there is a magnetism that creates and a magnetism that destroys, a magnetism of Ahrimanes the evil, as well as of Ormuzd the good. And all is not electric power that seems to be so. Our fancies and whims are not electrical. Being mere fancies and vapid caprices, they possess no creative force, and produce nothing that has more vitality or substance than a soap-bubble."

"But the love which possesses me," replied the secretary, greatly excited, "springs from divine, overpowering, irresistible necessity! It gives me new life, new vigour, new hope, and certainty of immortality with her, whom it has

made one with me, indivisible in soul—now, henceforth, and for ever!"

Mr. Rameses smiled at the young man's fervour—and the hard, practical element that was latent in his character, asserted itself at the expense of the visionary faculty which so largely predominated.

"The faith you hold may be good for the next world, but how will it serve you in your hard struggle through your present stage of existence? Say, for instance, during the next twenty or thirty years? I gather from your reticence—pardon me if I draw a wrong conclusion from it—that you do not wish to make her known to me, for reasons that are doubtless satisfactory to your own mind. If this be so, and the same reasons apply to the society in which you are accustomed to move, I must perforce conclude that the lady, however beautiful she may be, however angelic in her disposition, is not presentable to your friends? If this be so, I am extremely sorry for you; but do not wish to extort your confidence if you desire to withhold it."

"She has been vilely slandered," replied the secretary, with flashing eyes, burning cheeks, and rapid and indignant utterance, that caused his words to fall from his lips as if

they were red-hot embers of a smouldering fire. "Until I can refute the calumny, and dispel it for ever, I prefer that she should remain unknown to all the world—except to me, and to my heart of hearts. She shall not be looked down upon by any one who is or ever has been dear to me, or ever known to me. She is as guiltless in my sight as the angels in Heaven, although she is human."

"This world," replied Mr. Rameses, "is a practical world—full of peccant souls doing penance, and narrow-minded and prejudiced people, against whose opinions, even if they be such as we cannot conform to, we must not revolt against too violently, if we would live peaceably or without irritating friction. I will not seek to penetrate into your secret. Under the circumstances, I cannot expect the advantage or pleasure of your company on the journey I am about to take. Neither can I expect that you will continue to be an inmate of my house for the future; though it is doubtless large enough to accommodate you, and you have been both a pleasant and useful inhabitant of it since we have been connected with each other. I shall require but a slight portion of your time and services during my absence; and hope sincerely that on my return the slanders

you mention to me, without telling me of what they consist, against the reputation of the unknown lady with whom you have linked your fate, will be set at rest for ever, and that the sunshine of your days will no longer be over-clouded. I leave to-morrow, and shall not see you again until my return. Meanwhile, farewell; and may all good angels guard you!"

The two philosophers—the master and the pupil—shook hands. The young bridegroom took his way sadly, yet hopefully, to his young and fascinating bride; and Mr. Rameses retired to his books and his sarcophagi, and the society of Saadi Ben Ahmed, somewhat doubtful whether Ormuzd or Ahrimanes was the wielder of the magnetic or anti-magnetic power that had brought his impulsive secretary under its thraldom—whether it were animal, and of the earth earthy, or whether it were intellectual, and of the heavens heavenly.

Before accompanying Mr. Rameses and his companions to Egypt in his yacht, and narrating what befell them there, let us follow the rapidly-changing incidents in the career of Arthur Melville and his lovely bride, with whom he became more enamoured, in the obstinacy of his passion,

the more the story told of her by the Vicomte du Trianon clamoured for acceptance, supported by all the laws of evidence. His heart revolted against the evidence, and strove hard to bring his head to the same side. But what is head against heart? What is reason against passion? What is all that we ought to believe against what we wish to believe? What is proof, that we may reject, against the prejudice to which we cling? What is unwelcome truth against ever-welcome error, if the error flatters our self-love, or ministers to our darling sensual enjoyment? What are the cruel possibilities or probabilities of to-morrow against the fascination and pleasant realities of to-day? Nothing! nothing! Arthur Melville was in love sensually, and was a slave to animal passion, though he would have been deeply offended with any one who would have given that degrading name to the all-absorbing passion that possessed him.

The sensual impulse was not as sensually returned. The enchanting Molinari was as cold as her slave was impassioned. She froze while he burned. There was no reciprocity, no mutuality of purely animal feeling between them, and intellectual sympathy was totally absent. Why the Molinari married she could not clearly explain to herself,

unless it were to attain the social status in a foreign country which she had forfeited in her own. But if this object were attainable—of which there was little prospect—she had failed to reach it. And if she were cold, she was at the same time fickle; and she had grown weary of the raptures of Melville, which she could not share, and, unaccountably even to herself—except on the principle of the old French proverb, "*L'on revient toujours à ses premiers amours*"—she remembered the happy days she had spent with her very handsome and rich lover, who had first discovered her in her low estate, as a "*blanchisseuse de fin*," and raised her to the glittering but evanescent rank of a fashionable beauty, in the gaily immoral circles of the French metropolis. As the ill-luck, or, it may, perhaps, have been the good luck, of her new husband—Chance, Fate, Fortune, or Destiny, threw her in London in the way of that very person, who was no other than the Vicomte du Trianon himself, who, in a sudden access of truthfulness, had divulged to Mr. Melville the antecedents of the fair flower that he had plucked from its stalk, worn upon his bosom for a time, and then discarded it to replace it by another flower equally tempting and beautiful—a lily, a camelia, an orchis, a gar-

denia, or whatever else she might be compared to. They met in the streets, and the impressionable and inconstant Vicomte, smitten with a momentary return of the ancient flame, that he thought had been quite extinguished, and feeling no other electric fire in his frame at the time, yielded to the sudden impulse of speaking to her. He did not know that she had recently married, and she did not inform him of the fact, which might not have made a difference in the behaviour of the too gallant Vicomte.

A few days after this chance meeting, the fair and false Molinari packed up her valuables, and started for Paris with her old lover. She left a short note for Melville, bidding him farewell, recommending him not to make any attempt to trace her, informing him at the same time that his search, even if successful, would be useless. She added the startling postscript that she had a previous husband living, and that consequently, if Mr. Melville chose to consider it in that light, her marriage to him at the Registry Office was null and void.

On opening this missive, Melville turned pale with consternation, which was shortly succeeded by fury, and by actual—not merely by metaphorical—gnashing of teeth. His

first impulse was to follow her to Paris, whither he felt sure that she had gone—to discover with whom she had gone, for he was confident she had not gone alone; to take vengeance upon the partner of her flight in the first instance, and next upon her, if she would not return to him; for he still, amid the hatred which surged in his heart, and throbbed in his veins, felt that he might possibly forgive the treason—the worse than treason to the majesty of true love—of which she had been guilty, if she would crave forgiveness, fall upon his neck with tears, look straight into his eyes with those glorious orbs of hers, and vow once again to love him. His resolution was speedily taken. He took the train for Dover the same evening, and before noon the next day found himself at Paris, in search of the guilty wanderer, who had done her worst to blight his life by her falsehood and ingratitude.

His first object was to enquire for the Vicomte du Trianon, whose complicity in the flight of the Countess was not known to or even suspected by him. He did not find him at the Jockey Club, of which he was a member, and could gain no intelligence of him, except that he had gone to London some weeks previously. He next applied to

the Police, and on giving the name of the Countess di Molinari, though he failed to obtain the information which he so much needed, he acquired knowledge of the antecedents of the lady—that were anything but agreeable—that filled his mind with grief and humiliation—but that, nevertheless, did not cure him of the infatuated passion that possessed him for the too enchanting siren that had made a wreck of his happiness.

He lingered for a week in Paris, hoping, though almost hopeless, that the ubiquitous and prying police of the grossly immoral capital would be able to give him some information of his lost diamond—with a fatal flaw in it, but still in his fascinated eyes a diamond. Chance did more for him than the police, and just as he was seriously meditating a return to his duties in London, leaving in the hands of the detectives the task, to be well rewarded if successful, of discovering the runaway, he saw in the Bois du Boulogne, where he was sauntering objectless, an open carriage drive slowly past him. He recognized the Vicomte du Trianon at a glance, as one of its two occupants, and to his rage and horror discovered in the other "*La belle couleuvre*" herself, radiant as the summer morn, laughing

at some remark, witty or otherwise, of her companion, showing her lovely white teeth, fringed by her rosy lips, and hearing distinctly as the carriage swept by, her tinkling laugh, that, notwithstanding his anger, sounded like sweet music in his ears. "The traitorous villain has stolen my wife," he said, or at least thought, and added to the assertion another, still more emphatic, that he would be revenged, and would shoot him—not murder him, but kill him in fair fight in a duel, if his aim were good enough. Melville was unable to follow on foot the carriage which contained the guilty pair, but, as he calculated that the Vicomte was merely taking a drive in the Bois, and that he would return again to Paris, he engaged a passing vehicle, got into it, and told the driver to wait until he gave the signal to drive through the Champ Elysées to Paris, in the rear of an open calèche which he expected to pass shortly. His manifest object was either to trace his wife and the Vicomte to Paris, or to stop them *en route*, accuse them to their faces of the crime they had committed, and there and then to demand satisfaction of the Vicomte.

He had upwards of half an hour to wait, and as soon as the unsuspecting Vicomte's carriage came abreast of

the spot at which he was stationed, gave the signal to his own driver to follow closely behind. Little did the Vicomte and "*La belle couleuvre*," know that they were followed, and even had they been aware that a carriage was behind them, still less would they have suspected that the solitary occupant inside of the vehicle was a betrayed, injured, and madly wrathful man, athirst for vengeance against them both.

The carriage stopped at the famous restaurant the Café Anglais on the Boulevards, and the Vicomte du Trianon descended first, and gallantly helped the "fair snake" to alight, which she did in the most graceful manner, showing her dainty little foot and ancle, and her dainty well-formed leg, enclosed in pink silk, to a height towards the knee that excited the obscene admiration of the idle passers-by, who stopped to gaze at the fashionable little woman. Two minutes after they had entered the Café, and before they had had time to seat themselves comfortably at one of the little tables to order their repast, Melville, pale with suppressed rage, confronted them. The Vicomte looked surprised, as indeed he was, for though he was acquainted with Melville, he was not

acquainted with the relationship in which that gentleman stood to his fair companion, who, on her part, exhibited most remarkable self-possession.

"I do not wish to make a scene here," said Melville, speaking in French to the Vicomte, "will you step with me into the street for a few minutes?"

"Sit down," said the Vicomte, "and calm yourself. Is your business very urgent—and unfit to be discussed before a lady?"

"Not to be discussed before this lady, who is my wife," replied Melville in a semi-whisper, clenching his right hand with a violent effort, his eyes sparkling, his lips quivering, his veins throbbing with rage.

"Your wife?" said the Vicomte with genuine surprise, "I did not know you were married." And then, turning to his companion, he asked her, "Can you explain this, *ma chère*. Do you know this gentleman?"

"I do not!" she said with the greatest composure. "I never saw him before, to my knowledge. But you know him, it appears—What is his name?"

"Melville," replied the Vicomte.

"Melville!" repeated she. "Monsieur Melville, you have

made a strange mistake. I suppose I must bear a striking resemblance to some one you have not seen for a long time, and of whom you have but a faint recollection?"

"I have made no mistake, no—Madame di Molinari, that you once called yourself, now Mrs. Melville as I have the right to call you—I have made no mistake, except the fatal mistake of having once so far believed in you as to marry you! You, Monsieur Le Vicomte, you are a traitor, a seducer, a hypocrite, a villain! One of us two shall not survive the injury you have done me!" And so saying he walked out of the Café, taking no heed of the astonished waiters, who had gathered gaping around him as soon as they became aware of the serious nature of the conversation that was going on, and left the Vicomte and his imperturbable companion to their dinner.

The Vicomte, who heard for the first time the relationship in which his fair friend stood to the outraged Melville, was bewildered a little by the accusation which had been made against the lady, and by the cool firm denial with which she had met it.

"Tell me the truth, *ma chère*," he said at last, "that I may know how I stand with this mad Englishman. I shall

have to fight him whether or no, but I should like to know whether he has any real cause of quarrel with me, as he evidently supposes."

"He is a jealous fool," she replied. "Possibly he labours under the delusion that I am his wife, but Dieu Merci, I am not! and if I were, I would run away from him. *Il est bête, tres bête, affreusement bête!* Shall you be obliged to fight him if he challenges you?"

"*Noblesse oblige*," said the Vicomte, "and honour also, but I shall not kill him. Perhaps, however, he will find out the mistake he has made with respect to you, and apologise. But we shall see. Meanwhile we must dine. I have ordered a choice little dinner, and a bottle of Chateau Margaux, old, and of the first quality, of the vintage of the 'comet.' You would perhaps prefer Champagne? Ai Mousseux?"

"I would," said she, and the Vicomte proceeded to fill her glass, which she raised to her lips, red rosy lips, with a smile on her beaming eyes, and the mellifluous wish "*à ta santè, mon cher.*"

The Vicomte, notwithstanding the coolness, the admirable self possession and ineffable indifference of the

"Countess," believed that there might be some foundation, more or less solid, for the strange behaviour of Mr. Melville. But he said no more on the subject to his brilliant companion, enjoyed his dinner, and afterwards escorted her to a theatre on the Boulevards to pass the evening. Further this history declines to follow them—until the morrow.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL.

The merely animal passion that too often assumes the high and holy name of love, if stung by ingratitude, unworthy treatment, and perfidy, sometimes degenerates into the bitterest hatred. Such—for a short time, if not permanently—was the result in the mind of Arthur Melville, occasioned by the treachery and the well-nigh incredible insolence so unblushingly displayed by the lady whose Parisian cognomen of *La belle couleuvre* seemed to him, at last, to be well bestowed and thoroughly well deserved. He felt that, though he hated the Vicomte du Trianon, he hated the partner of his guilt still more intensely, and debated within himself whether it would not be better that his vengeance should be wreaked upon her rather than upon him. To shoot her in a paroxysm of rage would be murder, but to kill the Vicomte in fair fight would, according to the Parisian code of honour and of morality, only amount to justifiable—and, in fact, to meritorious—homicide. With these conflicting emotions opera-

ting in his mind, he sought out, on the following morning, M. de Palliasse, whom he knew to be a friend of Mr. Rameses, and who had been the means of making him known to Mr. De Vere. M. de Palliasse was confined to his bed by indisposition, and consequently unable to act the part of a second in the duel—a part which, had he been able to perform it, would have been by no means disagreeable to him, or to any other Parisian of similar social standing. He did the best he could under the circumstances, by giving him a letter to his particular friend, M. Victor Raboche—a fire-eating journalist, and one of the editors of the *Ca-ira*. M. Raboche was a politician of extreme views; a young man who, though arrived at the legal years of discretion, seemed, for all that was known and could be reasonably predicted of him, as if he never would or could arrive at discretion or moderation. When made acquainted with all the circumstances, he expressed his readiness to act as second, and dropped unmistakable hints that, if the case were his own, he would not be contented unless he killed, or maimed his antagonist for life.

M. Raboche delivered the *cartel* to the Vicomte du

Trianon, who, on his part, had recourse to another journalist to act as his friend—for the journalists of Paris all seem to consider that liability to fight duels and to act as seconds in their usually harmless, though not always bloodless, encounters is a part of the qualification necessary to the successful exercise of their profession. The second chosen by M. du Trianon was one Felix Cartigny, a noted writer of realistically-obscene but highly-popular novels, as well as an ill-conditioned newspaper critic. The duel was arranged between them to be fought on the following morning, with pistols, in the Bois de Vincennes.

The morning dawned dull and misty, under the depressing influence of what the French who inhabit the sunnier regions of Bordeaux and Marseilles call "*les affreux brouil, lards de la Seine.*" The state of the atmosphere was thus unpropitious for the combatants to take good aim at each other, even if they wished to do so. M. du Trianon did not wish to do Mr. Melville any injury, even to the slight extent of wounding him in the fleshy part of the arm or thigh. Mr. Melville had more vengeful ideas, and though possibly he did not wish to kill his adversary, would have been gratified rather than otherwise to maim him for

life. The challenged man took careless aim; the challenger a more deliberate one. Both fired simultaneously. Melville was unhurt, but his opponent staggered and fell heavily to the ground. A sudden shriek from a female voice was heard, and from behind a tree that had hitherto concealed her from the belligerents a young woman rushed forth, with hair dishevelled and frantic gestures, whom Melville immediately recognised as *La belle couleuvre.* She threw herself hysterically upon the body of her fallen lover, with loud cries and lamentations. The surgeon in attendance found that Melville's ball had entered the right side of his antagonist, inflicting a serious wound. As the injured man was lifted carefully into the carriage by the doctor and the seconds, the *Couleuvre,* darting a look of fury at Melville as she also stepped into the vehicle, hissed, rather than spoke: "*Imbecile! je te maudis!*"

"Beware of her," said Raboche; "the Vicomte is said to have been her first lover—though, perhaps, he was neither the first nor the second, nor even the twentieth! Anyhow, he will be properly taken care of—and you, also, should take care of yourself, lest justice should open its eyes and stretch forth its hand to inconvenience you."

Melville took the hint. He had nothing further to detain him in Paris, not even to wreak vengeance upon the woman to whose wiles and perfidy he had fallen a victim, though somewhat sorely tempted to do so. Taking the first train to Boulogne, he was soon on his way to London.

Thus ended his dream of romance, and with it all his lingering and cherished belief in the Heaven-directed and Heaven-inspired magnetic and electric force, as the irresistible power that compels men and women to love each other—or fancy that they do so.

M. Raboche, in driving with him to the railway station, informed him for consolation that his marriage in London with *La couleuvre* was undoubtedly a worthless formality, inasmuch as the lady had at least two previous husbands in Paris, and perhaps half-a-dozen others who had passed as her husbands, of whom the Vicomte du Trianon was undoubtedly one, and that, in all probability, as long as her youth and beauty lasted, she would have as many more. If the Vicomte survived his hurt—as he probably would—and grew weary of her, as was more probable still, she would not lack wealthy admirers—always on the look-out for fresh

Phrynes and Aspasias—who would lavish their gold upon her for the brief summer of her charms.

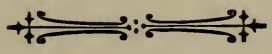
M. Raboche knew Paris well, and the manners, customs, and the vices of its people—both high and low—and Melville, with a bitter pain in his heart, or what was left of it, was convinced, against his will, that his French friend spoke the truth. He confessed—thinking, if not speaking, to himself in vulgar slang—that he had been "done," thoroughly, and ignominiously; that vengeance on the woman who had "done" him, would be deprived of all dignity if he resorted to it. She had, however, gained little by her dishonesty beyond her amusement, a few jewels of no very ruinous value, and the pleasure such as anglers feel in hooking a harmless fish, which is of no use to them after they have secured it. He could only explain her desertion of him on the supposition that the Vicomte was one of her early lovers, that she had a return of the affection—or the fancy—with which he once inspired her, and that the Vicomte's magnetism was of greater force and efficacy than his own.

This was but poor consolation to him, if any, in his affliction. Before he reached London he was

partially reconciled to his fate, especially when he reflected that nobody except Mr. Rameses knew of the entanglement into which he had rushed, and that even he was unaware of the depth and foulness of the pit into which he had stumbled. He resolved, however, as Mr. Rameses knew his secret, that he would confide the unhappy result to his sympathy, and entreat him to give no hint to a living soul of the misfortune that had befallen him, and of the causes that had led to it. But his faith was shaken in the doctrine, both of physical and intellectual magnetism as the predisposing cause of the attraction of the sexes to each other. But when this doubt possessed him, he asked himself whether any intellectual force whatever had impelled him towards *La Belle Couleuvre;* and whether the force, such as it was, was not wholly and grossly physical? He decided in his own mind that it was, and was of the earth—earthy—and of diabolical rather than of divine origin.

And yet he doubted whether the promptings of the flesh were not as worthy of credence as the promptings of the spirit, or how, he asked himself, could animal life be perpetuated in this otherwise miserable

world? All created things, even the trees and the flowers, were impelled by sexual affinities and desires, and how could a young man escape them? Thus he cogitated, until the arrears of the work which he had perforce neglected during his absence in Paris, compelled him to divert his thoughts and energies into the normal channel from which they had been diverted by his rash romance. For the love too often born of idleness, hard work is the best remedy. And so he found it.



CHAPTER XVI.

A SPLENDID WEDDING.

On the return of Mr. Rameses and his party from Egypt, after the lapse of six weeks subsequent to the catastrophe recorded in the last chapter, a great marriage was celebrated in London. It had been talked about for many days previously at all the dinner-tables and five-o'clock teas of Belgravia, Tyburnia, Kensingtonia, and in still wider circles (though these were wide enough), and had even formed the topic of gossip in the clubs of Pall Mall, St. James's Street and Piccadilly, where politics and horses, rather than weddings, form the subjects of discussion. The marriage of a handsome Asiatic, in the prime of manhood, supposed to be a prince in his own country, to have an income of at least a hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling per annum, which rumour had magnified into a quarter of a million—(some rumours had it half a million)—and who had been naturalised as a British subject, and determined to make London his home, and to shine a bright particular

star in society, was not an event of every-day occurrence, or to be lightly talked of. So the marriage of the Prince, or the Rajah Rameses, had been the nine days' wonder of the metropolis prior to its celebration, and promised to be a wonder of another nine days after that event; that is—if any possible wonder could endure for so long a period in this very fast era, when the telegraphic wires and cables and other marvellous agencies of electricity virtually annihilate time and space, not only to make "two lovers happy" as the mad poet of a bygone and slow age imagined might be done, but deprive every event of novelty almost as soon as it has happened. The fame of the bridegroom's marvellous wealth, and of the bride's equally marvellous beauty, was widely spread. The first was universally conceded; the second was considered of more doubtful authenticity, especially by the ladies, young and old, who had met her at balls, or dinners, or evening parties, or places of public resort. That she was not quite so fair of skin as an Englishwoman, was perforce allowed; though the assertions of some, that she was as black as an Ethiopian, or brown as a mulatto, were generally held to be exaggerations. Very marvellous stories were in circulation as to the splendour of

the diamonds with which she had heen presented by her future lord, the least gorgeous of which was reputed to excel in brilliancy and value the Koh-i-noor or "Mountain of Light" itself. No one knew for some days what the religion of the happy couple was, or whether they were of the Mahometan or other Eastern faith, or merely Pagan unbelievers and idolators. But all speculation on the subject was set at rest, or supposed to be, by the announcement that the marriage ceremony was to be celebrated with all imaginable pomp at the Romish Cathedral, by a cardinal archbishop, and that the two greatest *prime donne* of the day had been engaged on almost fabulous terms to lend the aid of their magnificent voices to the chants, the hymns, and the responses; that a choir of boys from the ages of twelve up to fourteen and fifteen had been engaged to swell the full tide of melody and harmony in the cathedral, and that the keys of the great organ were not to be touched by any inferior fingers than those of the most renowned organist, who had been especially summoned from a great city and a mighty Dom, or Duomo, either in Germany or Italy, for the purpose. This gentleman it was stated was to receive a fee of two hundred guineas for his rendering of the magnificent

Wedding March of Mendelssohn, that glorious hymn of triumphant tenderness, which no music composed by man has ever, so far as is known, surpassed in grandeur, sublimity, and all-conquering softness.

These and other announcements had caused an unusual flutter of excitement, which had extended itself from the upper circle of all the Duchesses, Marchionesses, Countesses and Baronesses of London, down to the cooks, nursery-maids, ladies'-maids, and shop-girls, and the idle women of all the parishes contiguous to the cathedral, and caused a greater crowd of carriages of the aristocracy to block up the avenues of approach, than had been known within recent memory.

There were twelve bridesmaids, six of them of a marriageable age, and six of them merely children, all dressed alike, in the most expensive manner, by the most fashionable milliners, with assumed French names, each with an exorbitant bill to present in due time, and which they truly imagined would be more willingly paid, if they called themselves Josephines, Alphonsines, or Adeles, than if they called themselves by the names of Sarah Smith or Mary Brown, to which they were legitimately entitled.

Each fair girl was presented by the bridegroom with a bracelet of diamonds and rubies, and each innocent child with a gem of which she did not stand in need to enhance her beauty, but the gift of which was held to be essential to maintain the unique grandeur of the occasion.

Among the bridesmaids were the Ladies Maud and Ethel Pierrepoint, and Miss Laura De Vere, and a very galaxy of youth and beauty, some of the component parts of which were not a little envious of the good fortune of the lovely Niona, who had secured in the market of matrimony such a glorious prize as the Prince, or the Rajah, Rameses, whichever he might be.

The wedding breakfast was reported in the newspapers of the following morning to have cost at least three thousand pounds. The flowers alone, composed of the choicest and most expensive of exotics, were estimated at more than one thousand pounds of the money, and were the admiration of all the "snobbery" of London, great and small, and excited the wrath of all the Socialists and Social Democrats of the teeming hive who inveighed on the following Sunday in Hyde Park against the misgovernment of the world by Fate and Providence (or the Devil),

who dealt out the gifts of fortune in such a partial and unjust manner, as to allow an upstart rich man to spend in perishable flowers in one morning as much money as would have provided a thousand working men and their starving families with food and drink for a week.

Unwholesome and prurient publicity was rampant on this particular occasion, for the amusement, but certainly not for the instruction, of all the idle women of high and low estate, of Duchesses and of shop girls—who, thanks to the School Board, could read the penny papers—the dresses of all the bridesmaids were minutely described, with the superadded information of the names of the fashionable milliners who supplied them. If the same sort of information were not provided for the gratification of the omnivorous readers of the cheap tattlers, together with the names of the tailors who made the dress-coats, vests, and nether garments of the gentlemen, it was, perhaps, because there was and could be no interest to anybody to know that all the dress-coats were black, and all the rest of the costume of the same hue, except the shirt and the cravat. Though it might possibly have been of interest to some

people if they could have been informed whether the dress suits were all paid for, and if not, how long a credit had been given by the tailors, or whether it were probable that these often-defrauded and long-suffering tradesmen would ever be paid. But the names of all the guests, male and female, who were present, were duly paraded to the world, which, if it cared anything about the matter for one day, forget all about it on the second.

But the demi-semi-educated public, of high or low birth, of prosperous or unprosperous condition, were, if not instructed, amused by the useless information that the newspapers afforded them; and by the end of the week, had utterly forgotten that such an event had been celebrated.

The bridegroom and the bride took few people, and only such intimate friends as Sir Hector and Lady Mac Tavish, Mr. De Vere, and Saadi Ben Ahmed, into their confidence as regarded the place where they were to spend the honeymoon. As soon as the wedding breakfast had concluded, and all the ridiculous speeches thought to be appropriate to such occasions had been made, a travelling carriage drawn by four showy, but serviceable horses, drew up to the mansion of Mr. Rameses, and the

wedded pair took their departure, amid such customary manifestations of good will as old slippers and rice are supposed to convey in communities which are not classed as Pagan or Superstitious, but which cling nevertheless fondly, or it may be only blindly and thoughtlessly, to observances which, whatever they may be, are certainly neither religious nor Christian in their origin.

Before taking his departure, Mr. Rameses had left with the private secretary a sealed letter, not to be opened until the morrow, directing him where to follow, in due time, to the destination appointed for their next meeting. That destination was Cairo, a city that had peculiar fascination in the mind of Mr. Rameses, more than half an ancient Egyptian in blood and descent, and almost wholly an ancient Egyptian in his adherence to the creed of the Pharaohs, as it prevailed in the days before Moses and Aaron.

As the first stage, in that long journey, the coachman was directed to drive by easy intervals of travel to Southampton, where the superb steam yacht of Mr. Rameses lay on the waters, all ready—with an experienced captain and a picked crew—to receive him and his bride on their arrival.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE NILE.

Mr. Rameses, as has already been noted, was passionately fond of music, a passion that the lovely, and in every respect sympathetic, partner, whom he had chosen from all the world, to share the joys and sorrows of this mortal life, enthusiastically shared. By dint of patient enquiry and liberal payment, he had succeeded in drawing together to his service a dozen accomplished performers on the flute, the clarionet, the horn, the trumpet, the bassoon, and other wind instruments, and who, in addition to the qualifications for the working of a ship as seamen and engineers, possessed a knowledge of music, and were fairly good executants. He called this "Band," so carefully got together, the "Silver Band," for the reason that he provided them all with silver instruments, because he thought silver to be more capable of the soft sweet melodies and harmonies that he loved than the brazen or wooden instruments usually employed.

When the *Niona* left her mooring in the Solent the day after the arrival of the bride and bridegroom, the "Silver Band" struck up the Newcastle air of "Merry may the keel row," to the great delight of a crowd that had gathered upon the shore; followed after a short interval by the equally lively, but more beautiful, Scottish melody of "Weel may the boatie row," which, as the dulcet tones were borne in faintly dying echoes over the quiet waters were greeted with redoubled cheers by the assembled multitude.

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on," if the old song and proverb are to be believed. Of happy augury to the fervid imagination of Mr. Rameses was the brilliant sunshine that poured from the unclouded sky as the *Niona* steamed through the Solent into the British Channel. Music and rejoicing followed on the way, and happy thoughts possessed both bride and bridegroom, as the yacht coasted the lovely shores of the Southern Counties of England and the Western shores of France, and found, even in the usually rough swell of the Bay of Biscay, a calm and a welcome that filled every league of the voyage with pleasantness. Delightful were the days, but still more

delightful were the walks upon the deck in the silent night, under the deep blue sky, that disclosed the awful majesty of the starry heavens with a vivid distinctness rarely seen in the "misty, moisty," atmosphere of the British Isles.

"How sublime is religion in the awful presence of the stars," said Mr. Rameses to the sympathetic Niona, "and how petty and mean is Theology as propounded in the creeds of Europe and the modern world which believes in the rare intervals when the engrossing cares of eating, drinking, sleeping, money-making and procreating permit them to think of higher things. Credulous as budding childhood that listens to a fairy tale, the multitude think this poor, almost infinitesimal, grain of sand on the eternal ocean is the especial, if not the exclusive, object of Almighty love, and that for its benefit alone all the countless orbs of Heaven came into existence. The crowds who believe the monstrous fable call themselves Jews, Christians, or Mahomedans. They are religious people—after their own fashion—as religion is interpreted by warring theologians, but not religious except in the narrow circle that bounds conventional morality, observance of the social laws and conformity to the ideas of their fathers and grandfathers—religious serfs,

in fact, bound to the soil which their ancestors cultivated. Their theology is but another name for mythology—though they are not aware of it—and laugh at all mythologies except their own. Forgive me, oh, my love," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Rameses, turning to Niona, "if I talk on such high subjects, but you know that I am powerless to resist the fascination with which they possess me, and that it eases my full heart to unburthen it of the thoughts that are not too great for inadequate utterance, but that are far too great for concealment."

Niona shared to the fullest extent the religious enthusiasm of her husband. His faith was her faith, his thoughts were her thoughts, his hopes were her hopes, his aspirations her aspirations, and his love her love. She was the "twin soul," of whom he had dreamed and thought—ever since he had been able to think at all—the crown and completion of his spiritual life—the heaven of his earth, the pulse of his heart, the union of fair body with pure mind, the corporeal and the mental in perfect accord and harmony—the basis of the only happiness for man and woman that is allowed or possible in this probationary world.

"I think with you," she said in reply to his reflections on the glory of the starry heavens, "that the modern world has not advanced in religious thought very greatly beyond the mythologies of antiquity. Priestcraft has increased—religion has diminished—Clericalism has become a trade or a learned profession, like that of law or medicine, depending for its existence and maintenance on the fees paid by those who believe in it."

"Every true man," said Mr. Rameses, "ought to be a priest of the High God, after the order of Melchizedek. Every father of a family, worthy of the name of a father, is by nature a Pope, a holy father in function and duty as well as in name, and should teach his children to lead pure lives, to cultivate their spiritual nature, to learn and to obey the divine laws that govern the Universe, and to look upon this poor world as but the entrance, after the time appointed for all living, into a higher and a better one. To teach this noble doctrine needs not the intervention of any extraneous and mercenary advocate. The Religion of the heart and soul transcends the trade religion of the Chapels, the Churches, the Cathedrals, the Mosques and the Temples, the Pagodas, and the Synagogues as

much as the light of the morning sun transcends the light of a torch or a wax candle that flares before the high altar. All the religions of the earth seem to be of the earth, earthy—and not of Heaven, heavenly. In fact, all the modern ideas of the joys of Heaven seem to me of a purely physical nature. The Mahomedans dream of a Paradise filled with beautiful nymphs or Houris, amongst whom they may select as many brides as they will; nor are the so-called Christians of every denomination and sect imbued with loftier aspirations, except in the matter of the Houris. To most of them the Paradise of Heaven is but an extension of the Paradise of earth, or Garden of Eden, in which Adam and Eve dwelt in physical happiness, while the Jews, less imaginative, think that length of days in this world is the greatest possible reward of well-doing, instead of being, as it really is, a lengthened imprisonment in the dungeon of the flesh."

"It appears to me," remarked the secretary, who had been a privileged listener to the discourse "that the Jews in the time of Moses, whose ancestors had been slaves in Egypt for three or four hundred years, when they obtained their freedom under that great leader, were unable to

emancipate themselves from the slavish ideas to which their long and hard bondage had accustomed them; that their sorrowful experience as slaves, condemned to unreasonable labour, in building pyramids and other ostentatious and unproductive works, had rendered them more than willing to receive as divine truth the notion that God had imposed work upon mankind as a curse rather than a blessing; that their sole notions of felicity were derivable from the pleasures and the freedom that they expected to enjoy in this world, and not in the next. They do not appear to have acknowledged that God was a spirit, or that the soul of man was immortal. Nations far older than the Israelites had nobler ideas. Job was a philosopher of a higher intelligence than Moses and Aaron, and, had he been a lawgiver, would have promulgated the more spiritual faith. Far superior to anything in the Hebrew creed was the faith of our Indian ancestors—true spiritual philosophers and enlightened sages, at a time when Europe, if inhabited at all, except by wild beasts, was only inhabited by the rudest barbarians."

"No," said Mr. Rameses, "the Druids, who are the earliest worshippers we know of, were not barbarians. They

reverenced the sun and the heavenly bodies, as embodiments or manifestations, visible to man, of the great Spirit of the Universe, and taught a religion of equity, justice, and a pure life. Spiritual Christianity in Europe and America is fast expiring under the physical weight of a vicious and effete mythology, and the equally crushing and suffocating weight of a rapidly-increasing sensualism, that pervades and almost monopolises the thoughts of Society, from its lowest to its highest grades."

In calm, sunny weather, amid discussions like these, cheered and varied by the strains of the well-trained Silver Band—whenever soothing or inspiriting music was needed, or was congenial to the moods of mind of the transcendental but supremely happy couple who were taking their nuptial holiday upon the waters—the time passed so pleasantly and imperceptibly that the yacht entered the Mediterranean before they were aware of the distance they had traversed. And here, inspired by the *genius loci*, the speculations and discussions of the pair took a new direction, which they followed willingly, into wide and fascinating and not altogether unprofitable regions of inquiry.

As the yacht passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, the

Silver Band striking up the cheerful air of "The British Grenadiers," in homage to the British garrison of the frowning fortress, Niona, who had lain in her state-room neither wholly asleep nor wholly awake, had a dream of the origin of the Mediterranean, of which she could not banish the remembrance from her mind, as she afterwards paced the deck with her husband to inhale the invigorating freshness of the morning. She hesitated for a time to repeat the vision that haunted her, until she could assure herself that it was remarkable enough to be welcome in the telling to the sympathetic mind of her husband. She had notions of her own with regard to the dreams recorded in history, tradition, and mythology, that forbade her to regard all the ideas that passed over the receptive mind in sleep, or semi-sleep, as idle and worthless. Just as our waking thoughts are often foolish, extravagant, grotesque, or utterly inane, so she considered that our dreams might be, and often were, ridiculous, inconsequent, contradictory, and absurd. But, in like manner, if our waking thoughts were sometimes noble, and founded upon the teachings of experience, or the promptings of an intuition for which we could not account, she imagined that our dreams might sometimes

partake of a similar origin, and be the result of a sublimated mental action, when the eternal soul within us, freed for a time from the debilitating influence of the corporeal frame that limited and imprisoned its energies, might take wide flights into the hidden realities of Time that was, and Time that is to be. Dreams, she thought, are either the blurred and heterogeneous impressions of past events, reviving confusedly in the brain, under the disturbing influences of bodily derangements, and are consequently worthless in a spiritual sense; or they are—in rare instances—the results of purely mental action, as totally untrammelled by the flesh as the lightning that flashes in the heavens. The inspiration of great thoughts which all great minds, and poets and inventors perhaps more especially, receive and elaborate in their waking hours, come also to great minds in their sleep, though too often dispersed, obliterated, or weakened in the waking hour by the physical influence of care, suffering, or apathetic indifference to spiritual things, that are more common to mankind than our appreciation of the fact—unsuspected for the most part—that the earth and earthly wants, and passions, do not form the whole of man's existence.

"Tell me," said Niona to her husband, "if it were a mere dream, born of my idle fancy, or an imprint on my somnolent memory of what I had thought of, or read, or heard of before, and which came back to me in my solitary silence? The mind—if vision it were, and not a revival in my mind of previous, though long-forgotten, knowledge—disclosed to me the mighty events of five, or, it may be, of ten or twenty thousand years ago, when the Mediterranean was dry land—a fertile valley between Europe and Africa, thickly peopled by a highly-civilised but corrupt race, enervated by their wealth and by the vices that grow out of it. Between what is now known as Gibraltar and Ceuta, the opposite coast of Africa, stretched a long expanse of sandy shore, on which the waves of the Atlantic had flowed and ebbed in their appointed courses for millenniums. From that point eastwards to Asia Minor, the teeming territory was inhabited by many millions of people, divided into many hostile nations, governed by mighty monarchs continually at war with each other, who filled the lovely and fertile land with desolation and ruin to gratify their lust of dominion. Upwards of a hundred great cities, with towers and temples, and all the pomp of architectural

splendour, were interspersed over the plain, abounding with wealth and luxury and all the physical triumphs of an advanced civilisation—but, at the same time, teeming with the vices that civilization produces, when it grows too ripe and decays into rottenness, as all civilization does which is founded upon selfishness and wealth-worship. Some of these empires and monarchies that divided the land between them had flourished for many centuries, under various dynasties of devastating conquerors, who shared dominion with the priests to keep the people in subjection—the one by the gorgeous display of physical force, represented by legions of armed and disciplined men; the other by the no less gorgeous display of ceremonial superstition, which they called religion, and by the soul-enslaving and blinding mysteries of the worship of their false gods.

"Time is non-existent, or is not taken into account in our dreams. A minute of a dream may represent and include the events of many years, and I saw in mine that in the progress of the ages, the narrow strip of sea-sand that separated the projecting points between the Rock of Gibraltar and the Pillars of Hercules was gradually in-

vaded by higher and higher tides of the great Atlantic, that stretched apparently limitless beyond, and that threatened annually to submerge the low-lying valleys, of which the protecting ridge of partially elevated shore formed the barrier against the ocean. The danger was observed by many of the natural philosophers and astronomers of the time, who calculated, or thought they calculated, accurately the movements of the heavenly bodies and their effects upon the little world on which the little insect, man, crawls, and thinks the stars were created for him to look at and for nothing else; but as the danger, even according to these philosophers, was exceedingly remote, no heed was paid to their warnings, and the thoughtless multitude sinned and suffered, ate, drank and made merry, made war and peace, lived and died, and left the world to their descendants—neither worse nor better than themselves, and scarcely worthier of remembrance in the after-cycles of Time than the green leaves, the fair flowers, or the dancing midges that sported in the sunshine for their brief hour a thousand years previously. But at last the appointed, and slowly but certainly approaching catastrophe burst upon the doomed centre of civilization.

Towers, towns, temples, and palaces—all the stately monuments of man's ostentatious pride and magnificence—were engulfed in the waters of what is now the Mediterranean. So fierce and rapid was the rush of the overwhelming waters when they burst through the last solid impediment that restrained them, that none of the many millions of the unfortunate people, except those few who dwelt close to the high coasts on the European and African shores, were enabled to escape, which some of the more robust among them were enabled to do by clambering up the cliffs. The inhabitants of the crowded cities and the populous plains all perished in the merciless and irresistible waters, by millions and millions, in one tremendous catastrophe. Tyrannical rulers and their armies, princes and plebeians, masters and slaves, priests and worshippers, rich men and paupers, head-workers and hand-workers, the luxurious few and the miserable many, women and children, and innocent cattle, all were swept into death in the pitiless flood, that in a few days rolled over them, as peacefully gleaming in the noon-day sun as if no such stupendous tragedy had been enacted in the face of the unconscious heavens, that looked down upon but saw not their misery.

"The inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, terror-smitten at the awful extent of the visitation, and looking upon their neighbours as worshippers of false gods, because their faith differed from that which they themselves had been taught for ages to believe—and which they believed without understanding—considered the Deluge as a judgment upon the myriads of drowned people for their sins and their idolatry, inflicted upon them by the true God; and went on sinning in their own way, as if the judgment and the warning were not intended for people as spotlessly pure as they were in their own conceit. They never once suspected that the portentous cataclysm was the certain result of natural laws in operation throughout the universe, and having no more reference to the virtues, the crimes or the existence of mankind, than a thunder-storm bears to the existence of the wasps or other flies that are a nuisance to men or cattle in the countries where they so unhappily propagate. And the awful judgment, as the priests and philosophers persisted in calling it, had no effect whatever on the faith or morals of the countless generations that succeeded them, or tended in the least degree to increase their reverence for the Eternal Ruler of the universe, or to

decrease the vice or crime that had prevailed amongst them for countless ages."

"A dream! an intimation! an inspiration! a revelation!" said Mr. Rameses, when Niona concluded the recital, to which he had listened with all-absorbing attention. "There can be no doubt that a mighty Deluge swept over a large portion of the inhabited world at some remote period anterior to the birth of Authentic History, if any such phenomenon as authentic history has come down to us, but of which a vague record is preserved in the traditions of the East and the West, as a fact that is not to be disputed. The Jewish record, which was once accepted by Christendom, and which represents the Deluge as having submerged the whole Earth, is no longer believed by Christian thinkers, or only blindly accepted by the gregarious multitude, who have neither the will nor the capacity to think for themselves. Even the Jews, to whom the modern world owes the story, have discarded it, except as a venerable fable, no more entitled to positive credence than a fairy tale. And your dream, oh, my love, even if it be nothing more than a passing fancy of the mind, originally formed in the waking state, but intensified in sleep—when the soul, disencumbered of physical weight,

is free to soar into the illimitable past or into the illimitable future, possesses all the elements of probability of which the Mosaic treatise is deficient. The souls of Amenophra and Lurulà, if they were two souls, and not one, seems to me to be your soul also, oh, my beloved! —my thrice beloved—my twin soul!—mine from all past eternity, and part of my immortal being to all futurity!"

The matter-of-fact reader of these pages, having followed the fortunes of Mr. Rameses to this point, will perhaps close the book in disgust, or weariness, or apathy, if he or she be expected to receive as probable the transcendental hallucinations, as he or she may possibly consider them, of a man of the world like Mr. Rameses, and may say of him and his flights into the world of imagination, as Festus said to the great apostle of Christianity: "Paul, thou art beside thyself! much learning doth make thee mad!" and Mr. Rameses, strong in his spiritualistic and Oriental faith, might reply, as St. Paul did to the incredulous Roman: "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of Truth and soberness," and add: "Truth, as I understand it—and soberness of argument, that invites confutation, if confutation be calm as my belief, and is supported, not only by appeals to my reason, but to my inner consciousness."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOLCE FAR NIENTE.

What is usually called the "Dolce far Niente," for want of an English synonym equally elegant and convenient, signifies a state of physical rest, in which all the sensations are pleasant, and free from the desire or the necessity of bodily exertion. But in this state the mind is not necessarily inactive, or the imagination lulled into quiescence. During the whole of his voyage over the sunny waters of the Mediterranean, Mr. Rameses might be said metaphorically to have been a dweller in the enchanted Palace, or the impregnable fortress of the "Castle of Indolence," to have fed his mind on the magical and slumberous fruit of the Lotus, and to have allowed his thoughts to wander uncontrolled into the wide and hazy regions of speculative philosophy. The idea that his beautiful bride was endowed with the mysterious faculty that has acquired in our day the name of "clairvoyance" had long been familiar to his mind. This occult force, faculty, or pretension, whichever it may be, was in bygone ages stigmatized as witch-

craft, and demoniacal posssesson, and attributed to a compact with the infernal powers for the injury and the deception of mankind. In modern times it is more commonly stigmatized by those who do not believe in the genuineness of its manifestations as knavish and mercenary imposture, because it seems to contradict ordinary reason, and consequently invites denial and exposure. But if it merely transcends ordinary reason, without contradicting it, no denial, whether supported or unsupported by argument is sufficent to disprove its claims to credence. If men believed nothing that they could not comprehend, their incredulity might extend to the why and wherefore of the existence of the human race, if not of all creation. None but people of very limited intelligence, consider human reason to be illimitable. What is merely incomprehensible, may be positively true, in spite of all the mathematicians and materialists that ever existed, from the days of Archimedes to those of M. Comte and the modern school of Atheism, Agnosticism, and Positivism.

So thought Mr. Rameses. "We see into the past," he said to himself, "and why not, under favourable mental or physical circumstances, into the future? There are

countless millions of planets, suns, galaxies, and constellations scattered over the infinitude of space, whose light takes fifty thousand, or fifty times fifty thousand years of time, as we measure it, to reach our eyes. We see these mighty worlds not as they may exist to-day, but as they existed ere their light began to travel earthwards, and which may in the interval have been extinguished by the decree of Almighty power—that dooms whatever lives, whether animalcule, man or planet, to die or change its physical form at the time appointed. Physically we are thus enabled to see with dim eyes into the Past, and if physically we are able to enjoy—faintly although it be—this power and privilege, may we not spiritually enjoy the still greater, and to us the more interesting, privilege of looking back into the history of our own small planet, and to the deeds of the men and women who inhabited it before us? Not to every one is accorded this high gift. Not often in any of us does the slavery of soul to body cease for any appreciable period. Not every soul is so free from the impurities, infirmities, and trammels of the flesh as to be capable of receiving or even of understanding the highest truths, and none but those who

in the successive incarnations of the spirit, have in each incarnation to which they have been doomed in the advance from mortal evil and suffering into immortal good and happiness, deserved to take a step in the illimitable progression, are so highly and holily privileged."

Such a soul animated, in the thought of Mr. Rameses, the lovely body of Niona, and explained the impulse which bound him to her in life, and would bind him to her in death, whenever that great change—but not end—occurred to either the one or the other. This change, the commencement of a new life, when it came, he fondly hoped would come upon them both simultaneously, and realize the beautiful phrase of the Oriental nations, coeval with and anterior to the sacred books of the Hebrews, "lovely they were in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided." Meditating much on this subject both before and after his happy marriage, he debated with himself whether he did not possess the power of will—exercised through the magnetic or electrical agencies that pervade the universe—to induce in her soul, in sympathetic unison with his own, that state of spiritual exaltation which temporarily liberates

the mind from the impediments opposed by the body to the expansion of the faculties?

He had not long to wait before an answer came to his inquiries, which, if not wholly conclusive of the existence of the power which he suspected, tended to confirm his belief in it. Two or three days after her recital to him of her dream of the Deluge, she lay apparently in a peaceful sleep on a couch in the cabin of the yacht. Taking a seat noiselessly beside her, lest he should disturb her slumbers, he gazed for a few minutes silently upon her face, fearing the while that even his reverently loving look might be rude enough to ruffle the serenity of her repose. He had been absorbed since he arose in the morning, in the idea that fascinated and haunted his mind, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, as it had been taught by the priests and philosophers of Egypt and Phœnicia, and the still further east of Asia, for thousands of years before Pythagoras had taught it to the Greeks. He still brooded on the subject as he sat quietly beside her, and watched the gentle heavings of her bosom and listened to the regular breathings that issued from her beautiful ripe red lips, as she lay in her innocence before

him. He had remained silent for at least ten minutes, wrapt in his meditations, when he was suddenly startled to hear her—in a low sweet voice, scarcely louder than a whisper—pronounce the one word

"PYTHAGORAS!"

She lay silent for fully a minute afterwards, when she slowly opened her eyes, and looking earnestly at her husband, clasped the hand which he had instinctively extended towards her. "I have been dreaming again," she said, "and seemed in my dream, though it cannot have lasted for many minutes, to have lived whole years of life as a priestess in the Temple of Isis. The vision was even clearer and more vivid than that which possessed my sleeping spirit when the events of the Deluge passed in a long sequence before me. It was so palpably defined, so free from obscurities and contradictions, so natural and truth-seeming in all its details, that it impressed me even more thoroughly than the events which befel me yesterday, and are still fresh in my remembrance."

"Do not fatigue yourself, dear love," said Mr. Rameses, "by repeating it to me now. The day is lovely. There is not a speck of cloud, or a haze of vapour on the clear blue

sky. A soft cool breeze is blowing, and a walk on the deck will refresh you after your slumbers."

Niona arose and mounted with Mr. Rameses to the deck, and, sitting down at his side, proceeded to unroll the picturesque panorama of her vision while the colours were yet fresh on the mind's canvas. "I know," she said, "that many estimable people despise dreams. You, oh, my love! are not one of them. Many dreams, as all the world is prepared to admit, are idle and worthless, born in the temporarily disordered brain of the sleeper, when the physical and mental faculties do not work harmoniously together. But I do not think that the vision from which I have just awakened is a dream of this nebulous kind, or I would not repeat it even to you. It was much too vivid and real ever to be forgotten. I seemed to live over again all the days and years of my youth in the sacred city of Thebes. I sometimes wandered alone at early morning through its stately avenues, and sometimes mingled with the crowd of worshippers who thronged on festal occasions to the great Temple of 'Am-Un'—so called in the ancient language, from Am, the soul, and Un, or On, the Universe —or stood in the marble portico to watch the devotees as

they entered the Holy of Holies, to bend in awe and adoration before the shrine, where the sacred fire of Heaven, tended by vestal virgins in their white robes, with garlands of flowers upon their foreheads, was kept continually burning. I saw, again, clearly defined as I passed, the old familiar and magnificent temples to the gods and goddesses—not worshipped as living powers, but simply as emblems of the might, majesty, and goodness of the supreme and only God. I also stood at the gate of the magnificent palace of Pharaoh Thothmes, the most powerful monarch on the earth, and witnessed the procession of princes, nobles, and notabilities who accompanied the Pharaoh to the temple of Am-Un, preceded by musicians, with shalms and drums and other instruments, amid the admiration of the shouting crowd, who bowed their heads and knelt before him as he passed. I looked again on the lofty towers, the long avenues of pillars and obelisks, each bearing commemorative inscriptions and hieroglyphs, to be read and pondered by the priests and philosophers as they passed to the Temple. I gazed for long hours on the calm features of the gigantic sphinxes, placed in the public squares, to hint at the mighty secrets which they were supposed to

know, but to hide with an impenetrable veil from the curiosity of the multitude; and wondered, as I passed, whether to me would ever be given the privilege of knowing and understanding even the least of the mysteries of the Universe, or of beholding so little as the dark shadow of the ineffably inscrutable.

"One morning, soon after sunrise, as I sat alone in the spacious porch of the Temple, I saw two men approach up the avenue of obelisks that led to it. One was a venerable priest, whom I knew as Amun Ra, the chief ministrant and hierarch of the great Temple of Isis, over the gate of which were inscribed the awful words: '*I am all that hath been, all that is or ever shall be. No mortal hath ever lifted my veil.*' He was a man of serene and benign aspect, slightly bent with the load of nearly fourscore years and ten, but had a bright, clear eye, and walked with the firm and resolute step of a man in his prime. He was clad in a loosely-flowing robe of purple velvet, of which the hems and sleeves and the broad bosom were embroidered with threads of gold studded with precious stones, and hieroglyphs of doctrine. The other was a fair youth of about twenty years, plainly clad, but shewing in every

lineament of his beautiful face that the divine fire of genius sparkled in his eyes and animated his heart. He looked with profound respect and reverence upon the venerable companion of his walk, and seemed to ponder deeply upon every word that fell from his lips. I also had seen him before, and recognised him as a student from the distant western land, imperfectly known in Mizraim, inhabited by a pale-faced people, slowly emerging out of barbarism, who worshipped many false gods and goddesses, whom they represented in human form, and to whom they attributed the vilest human passions of lust, revenge, jealousy, and unreasonable wrath. They were represented in Egypt as slowly emerging out of mental darkness into the light of a purer faith. This student was known to the philosophers and hierophants with whom he associated as 'PYTHAGORAS,' and his object in visiting Thebes, the oldest and most celebrated city in the world, was to study the wisdom of the priests of 'Am-Un' and 'Isis,' the maxims of religion and morality which they inculcated, and the arts and sciences with which they were acquainted, and carry the knowledge thus acquired to his own country and teach it to the people. He had been for five years in

Thebes, imbuing his mind every day with experience, and confirming himself in the new faith, that had taken such possession of him that he was enabled finally to abandon the last lingering belief in the superstitious errors that had been instilled into his mind in his credulous and receptive childhood.

"They both entered into the Temple, and I followed them. The morning worship was about to commence, with a 'Hymn to the Rising Sun,' with which it was the invariable custom to sanctify the day and dedicate it to the service of the Great Spirit, of whose glory the light of the sun was but a faint and feeble emanation—but, faint and feeble as it was, too transcendently powerful for human eyes to look upon undazzled, or without incurring the penalty of death or blindness. A choral company of boys and women, with voices scientifically trained, numbering three or four hundred, raised a triumphant hymn of praise and welcome to the new-born day, the choral harmonies swelling as they sang, into waves of music, loud as the sea when the wind lashes it into thunder. When this chant had concluded, it was followed by a joyous outburst of prolonged harmony that shook the Holy Fane as with another

tempest of sound, from psalteries, shalms, trumpets, bassoons, trombones, sackbuts, and other instruments, mingled at intervals with the shriller melodies of fifes and flutes. The spacious edifice seemed to my entranced senses to float like a ship in an ocean of divinest harmony, wafting me to hitherto unknown regions of beauty and delight.

"As soon as the music ceased, the venerable Hierarch, standing before the high altar, addressed the kneeling worshippers in a strong, clear voice, distinctly audible to the remotest corners of the holy place. His exhortation was short and eloquent, and impressed upon the multitude the duty they owed to the body and the soul which animated it, and dwelt particularly upon the sin of which many of them were habitually guilty—of cruelty to the animal creation, the humblest and meanest members of which, he reminded them, were the creatures of the Great Spirit that animated the Universe. 'All of these,' he said, 'are capable, like men and women, of infinite progression or retrogression, according to their obedience or disobedience to the immutable laws of the Supreme Being and the spiritual movements of the Universe. Thus,' he went on to say, 'the soul of him who systematically, wickedly, and cruelly maltreats and tortures his camel, his dog, or other four-footed

friend and assistant of his labours, and ministrant to his luxury—when the death of his material body liberates his soul or mind to find another physical habitation, may be doomed to suffer the pangs which he has inflicted in his human life, and become a prisoner in the helpless body of a beast of burden, or may even be fated to a still more painful penance, in the body of a worm, or a small insect, invisible to human sight, shut out in his amazing littleness from all but infinitesimal communion with the beneficent, benevolent and all-pervading nature that surrounds him.' The listening multitude bowed their heads at his words, and uttered, as if simultaneously, a loud 'Amen!' And then again the choristers lifted up their voices in another solemn and tempestuous hymn of praise and glory. The shalms, the psalteries, the trombones, the bassoons, and other instruments were sounded in triumphal harmonies—and the crowd slowly and reverently departed, and I along with them.

"Then my vision changed, and I formed one of a small group of spectators who had gathered on the sea-shore, far away from Thebes, to take a final farewell of the beloved student, Pythagoras, as he stepped on a trireme, to proceed to the vessel anchored at a short distance, which was to convey him back to his own semi-barbarous

country, where he was to impart to such as his countrymen as thirsted for knowledge, the hitherto unknown doctrines of the sublime spiritual philosophy of the Egyptians. As he waved his hand to the friends he was leaving, I awoke from my dream, and saw you at my side, oh! my beloved, and thought for awhile, ere my awakening thoughts concentrated themselves upon the realities around me, that I was still in Thebes—four thousand years ago."

"Your sleeping and my waking soul were in sympathetic union, when you uttered the name of Pythagoras," said Mr. Rameses. "Your thought communicated itself to mine—or mine to yours—not merely by mere accident and coincidence, as materialists might suppose, but by spiritual affinity—acting and re-acting, each upon each, with an attraction as certain and irresistible as the steel to the magnet, and the law of universal gravitation."

It was now full noon, and the "Silver Band," agreeably to the invariable custom imposed by Mr. Rameses, appeared upon deck, to enliven the voyage by the performance of the melodies and harmonies which he loved. He requested them to play the "Wedding March" of Mendelssohn, and to its magnificent strains the yacht made her way through the calm blue waters to Alexandria.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE SPHINX.

On the arrival of the *Niona* at Alexandria, on the second day after this conversation, Mr. Rameses was surprised to learn that his friend Saadi Ben Ahmed had preceded him to that city, having been unexpectedly summoned from London, where he had made arrangements for a prolonged stay. Mr. Melville was deputed to call at his hotel, and invite him to come on board the yacht as soon as he could make it convenient, as Mr. Rameses and Niona were not inclined to exchange their luxurious quarters in their floating home for the inferior accommodation of an Alexandrian hotel. On presenting himself to the sage, Mr. Melville was grievously pained to learn that the wound inflicted upon the Vicomte du Trianon in the unfortunate duel which the wickedness of *La Belle Couleuvre* had provoked, had, contrary to the expectations of the physicians and surgeons who had attended upon him, proved mortal, and that Madame or Mademoiselle de Molinari had, to the surprise of all ac-

quainted with her character and antecedents, manifested an extremity of grief that was, to all appearance, wrung from the agony of her heart. The first impulse of the young secretary was to return to Paris, and court such penalty as the laws of France might impose upon him. "Do nothing of the kind," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, "if you are wise. The tribunal would certainly acquit you if you submitted yourself to its judgment. Society has already acquitted you. The only aggrieved person is the Molinari—if she be really aggrieved. Even if she be, she will speedily console herself with a new lover, unless her reputation belies her real nature. I cannot, however, but regret that the victim was the foolish man, who did not know that he had wrongfully possessed himself of another person's wife—and not the heartless woman, who knew that she was injuring a husband who had loved and confided in her."

Mr. Melville, in his solitary reflections, as he returned to the yacht, persuaded himself that the advice of the philosophical man of the world was sound and prudent; that no good could come of his offered self-sacrifice, even if it were accepted; that though his hand had inflicted on the Vicomte du Trianon the penalty of the wrong he had done,

it was the hand of Fate which had guided the fatal blow; that his unhappy attachment to the woman who was the prime cause of the evil that had befallen himself and the Vicomte, was to blame for the calamity, and that he was the innocent instrument of a Destiny which he had not the power to control or to evade. "I desired love," he said bitterly to his own conscience, "and I found indifference; I sought truth and fidelity, and I found falsehood and treachery. I wished to punish the aggressor, but not to slay him; and merely yielded to what I considered to be a justifiable impulse, sanctioned if not commanded by the opinions and usages of society, and I became a murderer in fact though not in intention."

The immediate result of these cogitations was a determination to unbosom himself to his best friend, Mr. Rameses, and to be guided by his counsel. The unhappy young man acted on this resolution, and on his return to the yacht confessed to his sympathetic employer all the circumstances attendant upon his infatuated wooing, and still more infatuated marriage with the beautiful but wicked woman who had cast her fatal glamour over his imagination.

"You could not avoid falling into the snare that had been set for you," said Mr. Rameses. "You are young, susceptible, inexperienced, with hot blood in your veins, and the fowler that entrapped the bird was cool, wary and unprincipled, and fascinated your eyes by the too powerful witchery of her bodily beauty. The great error which you committed was to contract a secret marriage. Had you divulged your intention before taking the final step, the catastrophe and all its guilty results might have been avoided. Law is costly, vexatious, and dilatory, but for your own future peace of mind and freedom of action, you must have recourse to that cumbrous machine, to remove the impediment of the marriage contract out of your way. I will be answerable for all the expenses, whatever they may amount to."

The young secretary kissed the hand of his benefactor, burst into tears, respectfully refused the pecuniary aid so generously offered, and resolved to adopt the advice which had been offered.

Saadi Ben Ahmed came on board the yacht the next morning, and it was arranged that he should accompany Mr. Rameses, and Niona and the secretary, to Cairo, after

the delay of a few days, necessary to procure vehicles for the journey in the luxurious style consistent with the wealth and taste of Mr. Rameses. The journey had been originally proposed by Niona, whose life-long desire had been to visit the great Pyramids of Gizeh or Jeeseh, and to sit in the shadow of the mysterious Sphinx, so grandly beautiful in its desolation, and feed her dreamy mind with the thoughts and fancies of the Past, the Present, and the Future, which the scene was so likely to excite. She was greatly, but pleasantly excited, when she thought of the approaching fulfilment at the side of her soul's true partner, of a purpose so long cherished. She could not account for the uncontrollable desire which had taken possession of her to pay this visit to the venerable relic of a past civilisation and a dead religion, of which she had thought by day, and dreamed at night, without ever losing faith in the idea that her desire would one day, sooner or later, in fate's appointed time, be gratified.

It was a whim, a fancy, a vague longing, born partly of curiosity, partly of superstition, and partly of religious enthusiasm; but the idea—which might more properly be called a presentiment—had gained such possession of her

she knew not how or why, that she could not but resign herself a willing slave to its tyranny.

After a stay of a few days in Alexandria, Mr. Rameses and his party proceeded to Cairo with the intention, after visiting the Pyramids, to take a voyage up the Nile to the site of Thebes, which, almost equally with the Sphinx, was hallowed in the minds both of Mr. Rameses and Niona, by venerable recollections inherited from their race and ancestry. They stayed but three days in Cairo, where they found nothing to interest or to detain them. Saadi Ben Ahmed engaged two comfortable vehicles, one for Mr. Rameses and his bride, one for himself and Mr. Melville, and a guide in charge of the provisions and water necessary for the day's consumption. He took especial care to make a compact with the guide, whom he knew, to exercise influence over the greedy Arabs, that swarmed like vultures or cormorants about the bases of the Pyramids on the arrival of strangers, from whom they expected to extort *backshish*, that he and his party should be left unmolested, on condition that every Arab who kept at a distance should receive a double gratuity, but that anyone who approached within sight or hearing should receive—nothing.

Both Saadi Ben Ahmed and Mr. Rameses had ideas of the immense antiquity and supposed sacred purpose of the Pyramids, which were not wholly in accordance with any of those that are prevalent among professed and hopelessly antagonistic Egyptologists. They considered the great Pyramid to be at least ten thousand years old, how much older they did not think it worth while even to surmise. They considered that it and its smaller compeers were not —as some too readily supposed—the ostentatious tombs erected by a slavish people to receive the mortal remains of departed conquerors and Pharaohs, but that they had been originally planned by the earliest immigrants into the flat and fertile lands of Lower Egypt, who swarmed into the country from the mountainous regions of India. These early adventurers—driven out of their densely peopled Asiatic homes by the pressure of numbers upon the means of subsistence, as Europeans in our day are driven across the Atlantic to North and South America by the same causes—were worshippers of the sun and stars, and were accustomed to study the motions of the heavenly bodies by the aid afforded to scientific observation by the mountain peaks of their birth-place. They

were thus enabled to record and predict the periodical re-appearances of planets and fixed stars at the place in the heavens to which the summits of the mountains pointed. In other words, they held that the Pyramids were artificial mountains, erected for astronomical and religious purposes by a highly ingenious, cultivated, and imaginative people; and that the absolute power possessed by their monarchs was such as to command an almost limitless supply of compulsory labour, to complete these stupendous scientific and religious monuments. The Sphinx, they considered to be carved out of the solid rock at a comparatively modern period, when the primitive religion of the Starry Heavens had lost its early simplicity, and become encumbered with a grotesque mythology, personifying under animal forms, hybrid or semi-human, the powers and attributes of the Great Creator, and departing almost entirely from the purer religion of their ancestors.

Niona shared to the fullest extent these opinions about the Pyramids, but attached to the numerous sphinxes that guarded in ancient times the approaches and porticoes of the temples of Amun, Isis, and Serapis, and especially

to the largest of them all—which rears its sublime though mutilated head in the shadow of the Pyramids—an allegorical meaning, of which the Greeks caught a faint and distorted glimpse in the fable of Œdipus. She thought, with Mr. Rameses and Saadi Ben Ahmed, that the Sphinx, half-human, half-bestial in form, symbolized the two-fold nature of mankind, and that that two-fold nature in its turn symbolized the deep mystery of the universe which the spiritual man desired to solve, but which the beast, that was a part of him, forbade him to fathom, so that his mortal eyes could never see, his mortal ears never hear even the whisper of, and that his intellect, which was the all but helpless thrall of his limited and feeble physical senses, could never comprehend, however ardently and religiously it might strive.

These and similar reflections occupied the thoughts of her two elder companions, in the bright sunshine of the early morning as they proceeded on their journey from Cairo to Ghizeh, or Jeeseh—a drive of ten miles over a good road, pleasantly shaded with trees. The only one of the party who, on arriving in front of the Sphinx had any desire to scale the side of the greater or two lesser

Pyramids, was Mr. Melville. After having partaken of the temperate and refreshing luncheon of fruit and bread, and a supply of pure water in stone jars, with which they had provided themselves, he went alone to scale the stony height of the greatest of the three pyramids as far as was practicable, leaving the rest to their meditations and the conversation in which they loved to indulge. Saadi Ben Ahmed, who had studied his fellow creatures in every quarter of the globe, east, west, and at the far antipodean realms—destined one day to be the paramount powers of the world, and to reign over it, *vice* Europe, effete and superseded, as Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Rome had been by the growth of newer and more vigorous nations—led the conversation. It concentrated at last into an examination of the present condition of religious and scientific opinion in the Christian states of Europe and America, and a comparison of it with the state of men's minds when the paganism of Greece and Rome was being undermined by philosophic scepticism, and finally overthrown by the new and rising faith of the religion of Jesus Christ and his apostles Peter and Paul.

They all agreed in tracing many fatal resemblances

between the solid scepticism, and the unsettled and decaying philosophies of the Past, and the equally solid scepticism and conflicting philosophic systems of the Present, and the increasing indifference of the great masses of the people in all Christian countries to the narrow-minded and unearnest teaching of the salaried preachers of religious faith and duty. They agreed that the age was one of mockery, unbelief, and sneers, and that the multitude in all countries were fast losing their faith; that they did not love each other as the Divine Master enjoined, that they had no longer any reverence except for money, and the enjoyment and power which money could purchase; that their thoughts were of this perishable life only, and not of the life to come, and concentrated upon carnal needs and enjoyments. To buy and sell for exorbitant, or (if they were driven to it by greed and necessity) for fraudulent profit, was the engrossing pursuit of more than half of the people, who would rather overreach their neighbours in a bargain than labour honestly for just reward, and who thought that everything was fair in love, war, and commerce, however contrary to eternal justice it might, by strict moralists, be considered. The

poor dreaded to appear to the world as if they were poor, or to be known by their fellows in their true character; and preferred to pass their days in a pitiful masquerade of false pretence, as if they did not belong to the class in which the hard necessities of life, and the pressure of their own overwhelming numbers, had placed them. Imperfect Science was dethroning perfect Faith, though it only pierced the thin outer rhind of the great sphere of knowledge. Love had degenerated into Lust, Hypocrisy had arrayed itself in the garments of Religion, and paid it a tribute, not because it believed in Religion, but because an appearance of Religion was "highly respectable." The loudly expressed and recorded opinion of the majority was socially and politically regarded as the voice of the Almighty. Society and Fashion, however perverse and foolish they might be in their thoughts and actions, had become idols, false gods—Fetishes and Mumbo Jumbos—whom educated and uneducated people agreed to worship, or, if not to worship, to obey. The ignorant many tyrannized over the wise few. So shadowy and so flimsy were the pretensions of the respectable-looking crowds who frequented the churches and chapels on one day out of

seven, that at least nine-tenths of the seeming devotees acted as if there were no compulsion upon them during the other six to refrain from what they considered the venal offences and peccadilloes of lying, cheating, and slandering; and thought themselves good citizens if they paid their debts and their taxes, and committed neither forgery nor highway robbery, neither burglary nor murder. In Continental Christendom the women alone—not the whole of *them*—preserved a lingering faith in Jesus and the Holy Virgin, and a respect for the ministers of Religion, and nine-tenths of the men either despised it secretly or laughed at it openly. Even the paid ministers of Religion looked upon Religion as the trade and profession by which they lived, and shared with the people a love for the things of this world—thinking but little, if at all, of the next—disbelieving alike in the exploded notions of the torments of Hell and the physical raptures of Heaven. War had not raged more fiercely and constantly among Christian than among any other nations, but that it should have raged at all among the followers of the peace-proclaiming Jesus, showed that his followers were not true followers, and that they either disbelieved the doctrine He taught, or wilfully disregarded it an

inapplicable to worldly necessities, or impossible of realization in a wicked world, or as if diabolical hatred in human government was of greater power and efficacy than Divine Love.

"What would the spirit of the Sphinx say, if the Sphinx had a spirit and a voice to give it utterance?" enquired Saadi Ben Ahmed, turning to Niona.

Niona imagined that the spirit of the Sphinx animated her as she replied, "It would say, as I say, that all these symptoms prefigure the inevitable end. After the sickness that afflicts modern civilization will come dissolution and death, and after Death the new spiritual Life that will arise out of its ruins. Science will attain to its utmost possible and inherently narrow limits, and will strive in vain to overthrow the Faith that infinitely transcends it, because not circumscribed by the petty bounds of our perceptions, and by what we ignorantly call common sense. Common sense is an impostor when it pretends to account for everything, even in this world, and has not the faintest glimmering of any other, except when it confesses humbly that other worlds of body and spirit exist, of which it can know and imagine nothing. Thus saith the Sphinx, as I sit in its shadow."

And, as Niona uttered these words, she fell exhausted into the arms of her husband, uttered a deep sigh and fainted away, to the great alarm of her two companions. She remained insensible for several minutes, but consciousness returned while Mr. Rameses bathed her brow with water, rubbed the palms of her hands in his, kissed the pale lips and cheeks with passionate fervour, and lavished the tenderest endearments upon her. Then she fell into a quiet sleep, which lasted for a full hour, on awakening from which she expressed a wish to be taken back to Cairo. She slept in the carriage during the whole of the journey, and arrived at the end in a weak but not fainting condition. The medical attendants who were called in to consult and advise, recommended quietude and repose as the best restoratives for the perturbation which her nervous system seemed to have undergone.

Mr. Rameses remained awake and watchful, on a couch at her bed-side, until the dawn of the next morning, when she opened her eyes, bright and sparkling as usual. "Beloved," she whispered, as he bent over her, "I am better, though I once thought my last hour in this world was approaching. But I feel strong again, and know

that I shall not die until I have seen Thebes. Take me thither, and let your Silver Band make sweet music as we sail up the holy river to the once holy city."

"Thy will shall be done, oh my beloved! Thy wish shall be accomplished; and at Thebes we shall join our hands, our hearts, and our souls together, in a union more heavenly than that we effected in London. We shall be made one in Time and Eternity, at the shrine of the Temple of Isis, by the light of a fire, kindled direct from the Sun's rays, as was the practice of your ancestors and mine in that early morning of all civilization and all religions that have come down to this dark and misty evening of the world's history."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PYRE OF CONSECRATION.

It was not until a week after the conversation between Mr. Rameses and Niona, already recorded, that her health was considered to be so satisfactorily re-established as to permit her taking with prudence the voyage up the Nile to Thebes. When all doubt on the subject had disappeared from the anxious mind of her husband, he engaged the two most commodious Nile boats that money could procure, and had them fitted up with all necessary and appropriate luxuries for the comfort and ease of the travellers. He took care to provide himself with an abundant supply of sandal wood, cinnamon wood, and branches and logs of palm, in order to kindle a fire direct from the Sun's rays in front of the Temple of Isis—or what remained of it—in honour of his union with Niona, and as a befitting supplement to the religious ceremony that had been previously performed in London, and as a mystic reminder that neither of them considered the faith of their remote ancestors to be so

devoid of pious significancy as the later civilization of the world thought and asserted. The deft musicians of the Silver Band were summoned from the yacht lying before Alexandria, to accompany the party in one of the dabeeahs, and to discourse sweet melodies and harmonies on the voyage of three hundred and fifty miles to the mournful remains of the once grandest and most sacred city in the world.

Niona was in a flutter of pleasurable excitement and expectation. Thebes was her dream by night and her thought by day, and the strain upon her nervous system was so great, that it became absolutely necessary, in the opinion of her husband and all around her, that the visit should be made as soon as possible, that her mind might be restored to its usual equanimity. If she could but have known what the end would be, would she have clung to her hope so passionately? Alas! and thrice Alas! Could we, any of us, know what sorrows the gratification of our fondest wishes might bring upon us, or what blessings might flow from apparently cruel disappointments, we might learn to look upon the granting of our wishes with fear, and on our disappointments with hope. We might reflect, if we

were wise, that unkindly Fate might dwell in the bright sunshine, and kindly comfort rain on us unexpectedly from the thunder-clouds. Blessed is the veil that in mercy hides the future from our gaze, and that, if we could lift it, would in all human probability disclose to us, whoever we may be, or however highly placed, more sorrows than joys.

> " Happy are those who cannot see
> Through the dark vistas of Futurity,
> But happier far who never seek to know
> What Heaven in mercy veils from men below,
> And oh ! most sad, most miserable lot,
> To see the Future though we wish it not.
> To read our Fate's enigma in the gloom,
> Yet have no cunning to avert the doom ! "

Meanwhile, the veil being withdrawn, the thoughts of Mr. Rameses, as well as of Saadi Ben Ahmed and Mr. Melville, were as hopefully and pleasurably bent on the voyage up the Nile as were those of Niona. The low-lying shores of the renowned river, with the villages and groves of palm-trees on either side, offered but few attractions, either picturesque or historical; and were it not for the charms of social intercourse among congenial minds, varied by the enlivening or soothing music of the Silver Band, the voyage of three hundred and fifty miles on the broad bosom of the Father of Waters would have been

wearisome and monotonous. But wearisomeness was not of their party, and monotony was banished from among them by the discussions prompted by the overflowings of the full minds of Mr. Rameses and his friend Saadi Ben Ahmed, and the sympathetic reception of their converse by Niona, and the earnest attention of the young secretary, who was more of a poet and a philosopher than he was yet aware of.

"For how many millenniums, I wonder," said Saadi Ben Ahmed, as the *dabeeah* breasted the down-pouring current of the Nile, "have the rains of Central Africa formed and fed this mighty river, running its daily course, for what we poor mortals, from want of a better phrase, call 'for ever and ever,' and how many millenniums has this mighty river been engaged in depositing its mud and slime and superfluous earthy spoil on the low-lying shores of the sea into which it discharges itself, so as to build up, imperceptibly, century after century, this fertile land of Egypt? And at what remote period did men first take possession of the new-made soil, and from whence did they come? All history is but a thing of yesterday, full of lies, of fables and contradictions, and of truths, perhaps, which we do

not know to be truths, and which we lack the power and the means to test or to investigate."

"Such great questions are easy to make, but impossible to answer," said Mr. Rameses. "The men of to-day know no more of what happened on their planet a few thousand years ago, which are but yesterdays in the life of our perishable earth, than the roses of this morning know of the roses that flourished in the days of Zoroaster. Our living generations take small or no heed of the business of the generations that preceded them, and in their lazy contentedness with their own ignorance, which they neither can nor wish to escape, placidly or apathetically accept the abundant fables, taking no trouble to doubt or even to laugh at them."

"Yes," rejoined Saadi, "our prolific Mother Earth has produced trees, grasses, flowers, insects, beasts and men for countless millenniums, and men have produced and elaborated systems of civilisation for quite as long; and the trees, grasses, flowers, insects, beasts, men and systems of civilization have lived their day and died, to be succeeded by new ones, of possibly a better species. The civilizations of China, India, Assyria, Babylon, Phœnicia, Greece and

Rome, were but successors to or inheritors of civilizations perhaps totally different, either for better or for worse, and they have all disappeared, leaving no traces of their bygone existence, except in mysterious monuments, as in the pyramids of Egypt, the monoliths of Salisbury Plain and Carnac, or in the equally, or still more, ancient monuments of Mexico and South America. All of them do nothing but excite a curiosity which they fail to satisfy."

"True," said Niona, who had listened attentively, "and there were doubtless civilisations which have left no traces even in enigmatical stone behind them, not even a furrow on the earth's surface, and that are shut out from human sight and remembrance beneath the waters of the ocean. I have not only a faith that the Mediterranean covers with its undivulgent waves the sites of many once mighty empires in which art, science, philosophy, literature and religion flourished as luxuriantly as they do now—perhaps still more benefically to the races that inhabited them—but that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are the graves of empires. And if this be true of the past, shall not Europe and Asia, in the fulness of the time appointed, be engulphed, as other continents have been, by the irresistible and shifting

sea, and the now-hidden depths again expose to the sun the long-buried continents of antiquity?"

"I, too," said Mr. Rameses, "have also dreamed — imagined, or calculated—that the Equator of our earth was not always the Equator—the Pole not always the Pole, and that the earth did not always revolve on the plane of the Ecliptic. Spirit and matter, or some say Good and Evil—the Good paramount—form the Universe which has endured from and will endure to all Eternity. Matter undergoes perpetual modifications imposed upon it by the life-producing spirit, whether it manifests itself in the infinitely small, or in the infinitely great. "Small" and "great" are only words employed to express ideas that mislead us. Nothing can be either small or great in the Universal mind of the Creator. Wonderful alike, if truly considered, is the animated matter in the body of the minutest animalcule that lives, loves, and perhaps hates, in a drop of water, or that moves in the stupendous orbs of Sirius, Arcturus and Aldebaran, or the possibly still more stupendous orbs that the human eye, aided by the utmost resources of daily advancing Science, has never yet seen and never will see."

It was amid the indulgence of thoughts such as these,

that the party, after a journey of five days, arrived at Thebes, to explore its ruins and contrast the dead old city with the ever young and living Nile, on whose banks it once reared its towers and temples in glory and in majesty. The glory and the majesty and the religion that produced them have disappeared, but the Nile, fresh and free, still bears its fruitful waters to lands that without their help would be as barren as the Sahara; and a new swarm of ephemeral humanity, a new religion, and a new civilisation have taken the place of those which have perished, only to perish in their turn, whenever the great Spirit of the Universe shall so determine.

Such were the ideas that occupied the minds of Mr. Rameses and Saadi Ben Ahmed, as they stepped on shore to explore the perishing and desecrated remains of the magnificent Temples of Serapis, Am-Un, and Isis, that once made Thebes the pride of the Eastern world.

They had explored the two divisions of the defunct metropolis of Mizraim, one on each bank of the Nile, before they had fixed on the site of the Temple of Isis, which they only suspected, but did not know to be the true one,

from the fragments of once imposing obelisks thrown upon the ground, and of the rude remains of sculptured sphinxes which they supposed had originally stood on either side of the portico. Here, after much deliberation, they had resolved to kindle the emblematic fire, before which Mr. Rameses and Niona were to renew their plighted troth, for life and death, for time and eternity, and sanctify, by the old faith of their ancestors, the compact into which they had already entered, and hallowed by the new faith of Christendom. Neither of them thought the solemn ceremony to be senseless or nugatory, though it might appear to be so in the estimation of the fashionable society of London, which had witnessed and was aware of the previous ceremony performed in a Christian cathedral with all the pomp and splendour consistent with the ideas of the times. But to them it was a new holiness added to the old holiness, which had gone before ; the flourish to the signature, the setting to the gem, the crown to the king, which did not make him a king, but was the emblem of his power, the baptism of fire, and the seal of the heavenly and eternal upon the earthly and transistory—

" Love's holy flame for ever burneth
From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth. '

In all these respects the concluding ceremonial was satisfactory to their hearts and minds, to their thoughts of the present, and to their aspirations of the future, and they never asked themselves whether it were in accord or disaccord with the public opinion of their contemporaries.

Having selected the spot for the enkindlement of the pyre of consecration, a few of the willing mariners of the yacht *Niona*, the chosen few who formed a portion of the "Silver Band," were employed to convey from the Nile boat the logs and branches of fragrant wood that had been obtained at Cairo for the purpose. The pile was arranged under the direct personal inspection of Mr. Rameses. It was fully twelve feet in height, and six in diameter at the base, tapering upwards in pyramidal form, and pointing spire-like to the clear blue sky. Angus Cameron, a stalwart Highlander from the Island of Mull in Ross-shire, and a member of the Silver Band, who in his earlier days had often assisted at the not wholly obsolete Druidical ceremony of kindling the Beltain fire, on the first morning of May on the top or slopes of the lordly Ben-More, in his native island, took a delighted interest in the performance. Nor did the other members of the Silver Band feel wholly

indifferent to the ceremony, useless as it may have seemed; —for a bonfire is always attractive to onlookers, and there is a fascination about the mounting flames which few people, young or old, are able to resist. Mr. Rameses had provided himself with a powerful lens, to collect the sun's rays, and with incense to cast upon the flames, so that nothing was wanting to the befitting and decorous observance of the rite on which Mr. Rameses and Niona had set their hearts—nothing but the much-desired absence of the prowling Arabs of the desert, who were certain to be attracted to the spot by the double-edged incentive of greed and curiosity. This was, however, a matter of easy management in the hands of Saadi Ben Ahmed, who knew their ways and spoke their language. He was able without much difficulty to purchase their withdrawal out of sight and hearing, by a preliminary payment of backsheesh, and the payment of a second instalment if they kept to their bargain, a method of arrangement which had proved successful with their fellows a few days before in the shadow of the Sphinx.

Niona grew more excited as the time approached for the kindling of the mystical "fire of consecration," to which

she looked forward with religious emotion. As she and Mr. Rameses, accompanied by Saadi Ben Ahmed and Mr. Melville, proceeded from the Nile boat to the place appointed for the ceremony, among the ruins of a once magnificent temple, preceded by the Silver Band, playing Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"—selected for the occasion—Mr. Rameses thought that his bride, arrayed in her bridal robes, wearing a coronet of diamonds that sparkled through the gauzy web of the white veil that covered her head and face, had never before looked so heavenly beautiful. Her eyes seemed, in the glamour that his passionate love had cast over her, to glow with a light from the skies that far surpassed in its intensity the garish lustre of the gems that adorned her forehead, while her animated countenance suggested the immortal youthfulness and beauty of Hebe and Euphrosyne, as represented by the poets and sculptors of Hellas.

On arrival at the yet unkindled pyre, Mr. Rameses, turning his gaze to the noon-day sun for the short space that his eyes permitted him, unblinded or undazzled, to do so, formed a prayer in his silent mind to the ineffable Creator of the sovereign luminary of the world, that the fire which

he was about to draw from its beams would sanctify the love between the wedded pair who now stood erect in its presence, and make it as pure, intense, and eternal as the light of Heaven. A similar thought or prayer passed through the mind of Niona as she eagerly watched the brilliancy which shone in the lens which her husband steadily directed upon the small heap of stubble and shreds of perfumed paper which had been placed in contact with the pyre. In a few minutes the wished-for flame leaped upon the combustible mass and rapidly mounted amid the branches and twigs placed to receive it. The blue smoke clomb and curled in the clear air, and spread around, as it diffused and ascended, an odour as of incense in a cathedral.

Niona, as she felt the pressure of her husband's hand upon her arm, and his kiss upon her lips, as they stood reverentially before the crackling and ascending flames, suddenly uttered a sharp cry of either joy or pain—none could tell which—and fell back senseless into the arms outstretched in a moment to receive her. She breathed but one word, heard alone by Mr. Rameses—the word LOVE—and, closing her eyes, became unconscious and helpless.

Saadi Ben Ahmed, who had studied medicine in his youth, both in India and in Europe, and had a little medicine case in his pocket, administered such restoratives as he thought advisable. He endeavoured to feel her pulse, but it was imperceptible; put his ear to her heart, but heard no faintest movement of the mechanism within; and shaking his head mournfully, knew that the spirit had returned to the God who gave it. The over-sensitive Niona had expired of strong mental excitement, acting upon a weakened frame. The body was tenderly and sorrowfully borne by the awe-stricken mariners of the Silver Band to the Nile barge, which had brought them so joyously and hopefully to the fatal ruins of Thebes, so sacred to the heart of the living Niona, and so more than sacred to the heart and soul of her afflicted husband. The return to Cairo was immediately commenced. The body was laid reverently in the cabin of the dabeeah, which none presumed to enter, except Mr. Rameses, who sat silently by the side of the lovely corpse—lovelier even in death than it had been in life—and refused all comfort, all sustenance, all sleep both by night and by day. On arrival at Cairo, the body was embalmed, placed in a sumptuous sarcophagus,

preparatory to its final interment in a mausoleum at Thebes, which Mr. Rameses had determined to erect, under which she and he should lie side by side together.

The tale is told. Mr. Rameses was stunned, but not vanquished; reconciled to live on because Destiny had so willed it; reconciled to a further term of earthly existence, but not in love with it; ready for death and hopeful of its coming, that it might open the glorious gate through which his spirit would pass into a higher, holier and happier state of being, in which he and his soul's partner should be united in perfect and eternal beatitude.

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It is only necessary to record, in conclusion of the story, that Mr. Rameses, after this heavy blow, lost the little love that he had ever felt for the enormous wealth he had inherited, and that he resolved to distribute it while he yet lived, instead of bequeathing it by will after his death, for the fulfilment of purposes on which his heart was set. He bestowed munificent gifts upon his dearest friends, amongst whom Mr. De Vere held the foremost place, Saadi Ben Ahmed the second, his brother-in-law, Sir Hector, the

third, and his young secretary and disciple, Mr. Melville, the last—besides devoting large sums to the endowment of charitable and educational institutions in India, Egypt and England. He applied the remnant to the erection of a magnificent mausoleum at Thebes, on the site of the "fire of consecration," whence the beautiful spirit of Niona had taken its last flight from its mortal habitation, resolving that the edifice should rival the renowned Taj Mahel in splendour and costliness, if money, skill and architectural genius could accomplish the feat. He has wholly disappeared from London life, is sometimes a quiet guest of Mr. De Vere at the Rookery, but passes most of his time in Egypt, with his friend, Saadi Ben Ahmed, engaged in the necessary preparations and plans for the great mausoleum that, in the fulness of time, is destined to receive his mortal remains, to rest alongside those of his beloved Niona.

THE END.

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